MARCH 1951

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ARGOSY

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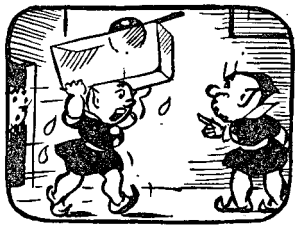

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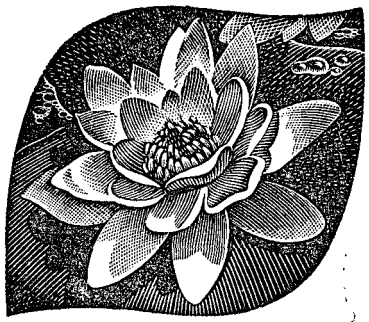

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ARGOSY

Contents for March, 1951

Vol. XII **No. 3**

		Page
Awakening	**Gordon Bottomley**	**4**
By courtesy of Constable & Co.		
Ride The Gale	**Neil M. Gunn**	**5**
Food of Love		**16**
The Peto Sisters	**A. L. Barker**	**17**
The Crow and the Oriole	**James Thurber**	**29**
Copyright 1939, by permission of "The New Yorker"		
Come Dance With Me		**30**
"Masquerade," by courtesy of Jonathan Cape; "Dragon Dance," by permission of Methuen & Co.; "The Fiddler of Dooney," from "The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats," by courtesy of Mrs. Yeats		
Three Dogs of Siena	**William Sansom**	**33**
The Ring	**Norman Edwards**	**45**
No Weeping Tonight, Bacchetta!	**Joseph Wechsberg**	**53**
Witching-Time		**67**
Idyll of the Sahara	**Lord Dunsany**	**69**
The Green Machine	**Ray Bradbury**	**81**
Cobwebs and Cream		**86**
"The Mpopo-Popo Bird," by permission of Hamish Hamilton; "Horse Sense," by courtesy of J. M. Dent & Sons		
The Night The Brick Came Through The Window	**J. T. Story**	**89**
The Strange One	**N. R. Lamburn**	**95**
Down To Earth		**106**
"Matter of Form," by permission of William Collins; "The Immortal Devil," by courtesy of Mrs. W. H. Davies and Jonathan Cape; "As With A Cobra," by permission of George Allen and Unwin		
Lili Marie	**Vereen Bell**	**109**
The Phoenix	**Ogden Nash**	**120**
Death and Mr. Mallett	**Steven Bracher**	**121**
In Praise of Green	**Antonia Saxon**	**126**
Last Chukker	**J. K. Stanford**	**127**
Argosy Crossword		**160**

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Awakening

WHIRL, snow, on the blackbird's chatter ;
You will not hinder his song to come.
East wind, Sleepless, you cannot scatter
Quince-bud, almond-bud,
Little grape-hyacinth's
Clustering brood,
Nor unfurl the tips of the plum.
No half-born stalk of a lily stops ;
There is sap in the storm-torn bush ;
And, ruffled by gusts in a snow-blurred copse,
'Pity to wait' sings a thrush.

GORDON BOTTOMLEY, 1874-1948

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RIDE THE GALE

"If you cannot think of yourself," he yelled, "think of your crew!"

by NEIL M. GUNN

AGAIN Rock Island boomed, but this time a scurry of spume swept their three faces. Old Malcolm, the skipper, lifted his head and stared at the sheer cliff edge on the weather side. Slowly, automatically his right hand hitched the deep sea fishing line to one of the wooden rowlock pins.

His son, Angus, blue eyed, quick moving and twenty three, swiftly drew his line in over the gunwale and landed a thrashing cod on the footboards. Willie Duncan looked at the old man's face and then at the whirl of spindrift which this time eddied right round the open eighteen foot boat. There could be no doubt about it: the wind was veering, and when it went a few more points to the west, they could not live where they were.

The rock face was no longer a shelter; it was a death trap. Malcolm's high cheekbones glistened from the salt spray as he surveyed the seas which, here and there, out in the open, crashed and smoked.

Sudden winter storms roaring down from the Arctic were common enough on this Northern Scottish coast, so men had to fish when they could. As death reared and reached for them from the sea, they grew cool, gathered themselves, and when they spoke their voices were calmer than by their own firesides. Sometimes, indeed, a gentleness came upon the face of a great seaman, and Malcolm was the greatest on that coast.

"What's the time?" he asked.

Willie got his watch out from under his yellow oilskin and answered, "I make it twenty past ten."

Malcolm thought for a little while. "We'll give it half an hour," he decided.

"It should be on the turn then," Willie agreed, thinking of the tide.

When the tide turned it would not only be going with the wind, which would make the seas longer and more predictable, but also would be increasing the depth over the treacherous harbour bar. And their only hope of life now lay in crossing that bar.

Once Malcolm had ridden out a gale in this shelter; and the

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others knew it had been in his mind when he had chosen his fishing ground in the grey of the dawn. No other boat had left the harbour, but the weather had been broken over a long spell, and Malcolm had decided as the wind fell away in the small hours of the morning that the worst had blown itself out.

" Your line ! " Angus said.

The old man began hauling in his line, at first as swiftly as Angus had done, hand over hand, but then more slowly until he was checked altogether.

There was a long fight before Angus got the gaff into the biggest turbot he had ever seen and straightened the iron as he heaved the great flat fish over the gunwale. His eyes gleamed like a schoolboy's.

" That's the king of them ! " declared Willie, who loved fun and songs and drinking parties. " We're doing fine ! " And he winked to Angus out of his merry forty year old face. The surge against death was rising in him.

As the skipper began baiting his two hooks again, Willie laughed and, turning away, was pitched head-first over the lugsail. The wind screamed where the cliff edge knifed it.

They could see the low distant coast of the mainland beyond the waves that raced like converging herds of monstrous beasts. Willie glanced over his shoulder at the island, which was little more than a huge rock in the sea. In calm weather he had landed on it to climb its face and collect gulls' eggs or birds, like puffins. Now the water rose and fell twelve to fifteen feet and streamed white off the landing ledge. Nothing afloat could risk going within yards of its boiling turmoil. And the boil was growing fiercer as the wind veered.

Apart from this straight face of cliff that sheltered them, there was nothing but curving precipice right round the weather side. The motion of the boat was steadily growing more tumultuous. When eddying swirls began to swing her on her anchor towards the rock, they stopped fishing.

Presently Willie said, " The tide has turned."

" Yes," said the old man, his eyes narrowing on the seas. He had to make his decision. " The wind is still rising."

" It is," said Willie. " I don't like the look of it to the west'ard."

" There's a nasty lump of weather there," the skipper agreed, " with a root to it, by all appearances."

Their chance of survival in the open was now very slim and fast growing hopeless. " We could do with more water on the bar yet," said the skipper.

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" Perhaps you're right," said Willie.

Both stared towards the mainland.

At last the old man stirred. " Well, boys—" he began, but his son interrupted him with a cry.

They were all long sighted and, though she was hidden often, they soon knew that a craft of some kind was making for them.

It was Willie who said, "It's the lifeboat."

Neither father nor son spoke, but they could see it was the lifeboat. She must have gone out on a long leg to starboard and was now bearing down on them, cresting a spinning wave and disappearing. As she drew nearer she showed the tremendous seas that were running, and when a green one broke clean over her bows, Willie stole a look at Malcolm and saw the change in the old man's expression—saw a face hard as stone, with a concentrated glint in the eyes.

With discomfort Willie looked at the bottom boards, at the well of dead fish, for he was suddenly sorry for the old man.

It was not that Norman, skipper of the lifeboat, and Malcolm were political opponents, with Norman all for the new way of life, complete with government assistance, and Malcolm for the old individualism—that kind of political warfare enlivened many an evening and no harm done—it was that the old man should be caught out in his sea lore, that he should be wounded so deeply in his sea pride, that he should be saved by Norman, of all people. Worse still, Norman had said last night that more dirty weather was coming because he had heard it on the wireless; there was a depression off Iceland.

" If we were going to wait until there wasn't a depression off Iceland," Malcolm had remarked, " it's living on winkles we would be. I prefer to smell the weather myself."

The climb down was not going to be easy.

Eager and buoyant under her powerful engines, her sensitive helm, the lifeboat now smashed the foaming crests to either side and left them to lick in over her. Norman's sou'wester was steady and purposeful as a cowl of black iron. Up she came and hove to, engines idling.

" Ahoy, there ! " roared Norman.

Malcolm, who had stooped to put things ship-shape, looked up and across at the lifeboat and its crew of local men with apparent astonishment.

Then he stood up and roared back at Norman, " What are you wanting ? " The Viking blood in him was rising.

Every face took on a strange smile, and Willie felt a shiver of wild mirth go over him.

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"We've come for you," roared Norman.

There was always something authoritative in Norman's voice beyond perhaps what he intended.

"Who sent you?" shouted Malcolm.

"Common sense," shouted Norman.

"Thought you had parted with it to the government long ago," called Malcolm.

There was a laugh, for the conversation was shaping well. A few more jokes of the sort, and Malcolm and his crew might climb aboard the lifeboat with reasonable grace, giving nearly as good as they got.

But Norman had to show his hand. "The government is going to save you in spite of yourself. I always told you it would come to that." The laugh could be seen on his face, for the craft were now only a short distance apart. "Stand in to come aboard!" he ordered.

Malcolm made no move; his features hardened.

Willie cursed Norman in his soul. In his self-importance the man could not understand how the direct order could not be obeyed. Malcolm was still in his own boat.

Then Willie saw Malcolm turn away and look over the swinging seas and he knew, with an awe seeping cold to his roots, that now the decision was being taken.

"Hurry up, man!" cried Norman, giving his engines a kick astern, for the back eddy was drawing him to the rock. "Get a move on!"

Malcolm did not answer; he looked about his boat, then at his son's face, and pointed to the anchor rope. A curious sharpening in the old man's expression sent Willie's glance to Angus' face and he saw a twist of the features, unhappy and uncertain, like a weak, silent laugh.

But Angus was already hauling on the rope, hand over hand, with the swift deft action that characterized him. Willie left him to it, for it was a light fishing anchor, and in a few moments Angus swung it clean in over. He was a limber, fine looking lad with the reputation of being more game than most.

With a glance at the skipper, Willie made to handle the oars, but the skipper's open hand stopped him. "Her head's falling off," said Malcolm. "She'll do."

"Look out for the rope!" cried Norman, as one of his crew stood up with the coils of a heaving line in his hand.

Malcolm, with his boat swinging under him, stood to his full height and pushed his open hand against them. "We'll manage," he cried. "Thank you all the same."

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Then he turned his back on the lifeboat, stooped, picked up the tiller and getting to his knees, fixed it fast on top of the rudder. And everyone realized that Malcolm was going home under his own sail in his own boat.

The rock boomed; from its weather edge a swirl of spindrift lashed their faces, but no eye blinked in that involuntary human silence.

Suddenly Norman's voice boomed: "Good God, are you mad? Don't you see the sea that's running?"

But Malcolm turned to the brown sail wrapped round its yardarm. "To the last reef," he said.

Willie got going, but Angus did not move, as though a lethargy had struck his body. The uncertain look was back in his face, the queer smile that twisted his mouth.

"If you cannot think of yourself," yelled Norman, "think of your crew!" Norman was a good seaman, a successful fisherman, and genuine fear lifted his voice to anger. For he would never have brought his men out if he had thought an open boat could live in these seas.

Something of that genuineness seemed to touch Malcolm, for he now looked at his crew, and at his son's face. It was then Willie saw that the old man thought his son was afraid. It was a terrible moment. It obliterated all thought inside Willie's head. It would destroy the old man.

Malcolm's face gathered an awful impersonal calm. "Do you want to go aboard?" he asked his son.

And Angus could not meet his father's eyes.' He glanced here and there with a congested petulance while the drawn skin whitened round his mouth.

"I think we should," he said, and gulped, and his eyes suddenly flashed in a sort of dumb wrath.

The old man drew his eyes away. They rested on Willie. And Willie could not speak.

"Very well," said Malcolm, "I'll put you both on board."

In a flash Willie said, "If you're not coming yourself you won't put me!"

At that moment the heaving line shot across their open boat like a whip-lash. Malcolm cringed while Willie groaned. Never in all eternity would Norman learn what moved men at the core in a desperate moment.

"Take hold of the line," said Malcolm to his son, "and I'll put you on board."

Angus looked at it and looked away without touching it.

A bleak deadly smile came to the old man's face. "There are times, perhaps, when it's better to drown." Picking up the heaving

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line, he methodically coiled it as far as he could and pitched it into the sea.

Back on the coast, on the cliff heads beyond the harbour, excitement was mounting, for as word went round that Malcolm was at sea, caught in the winter storm, folks trickled in even from distant crofts.

That it was Malcolm who was caught and Norman who had gone to rescue him—if rescue there might be—was the sort of awesome joke that assailed their lives occasionally. If the joke came off, Malcolm might have less to say about Norman's committees and his letters to the board!

These thoughts drew arguments and spouts of queer delight from the younger men, who had to find an outlet from suspense somehow. But the older, more experienced men said little, their weathered faces still, their eyes steady.

A few daring young spirits got out on the point of the short headland, leaning against the wind or down on all fours. From the skerries below them, clouds of spume rose, and large bubbles soft as feathers burst on their faces. Excitement was already grouping them round a crouching figure with a telescope.

In a very short time everyone knew that Norman was standing in to Rock Island, so Malcolm must be there! He could not have run for anywhere else. And if he was there, what about his boat? Youthful voices lifted their shrill arguments against the roar of the sea. No open boat could live in those terrific seas. She would fill long before they were half way. They would have to cut her adrift.

The boat was a member of the family, the breadwinner. And Malcolm wouldn't like losing the *Rose of Sharon*. An eager voice crying that Malcolm could sail her into the eye of the wind with a sail tight as a board was smothered in irony, for the young could not yet believe in tragedy, nor entertain the thought that Malcolm himself might not come back; nor Angus, their star footballer; nor Willie, who would pour a laugh out of a dry bottle.

Five young women clung together, well away from the cliffs, their eyes on the white horses of the sea, the wind moulding their bodies and pushing them back. Peggy, Norman's daughter, was one of them, and her pale face looked cold as the flying foam, and her eyes were dark as tragedy, a darkness that deepened as she sometimes smiled a queer drawn smile and glanced neither here nor there, like Angus in the boat.

And then the moment came when the harbour master's son,

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who had the spyglass, said something, and the others on the headland clustered round him, crying, " What's that ? "

" They're sailing her ! Malcolm is sailing her ! "

" Here, give me that glass ! "

They wrangled for a little, their voices sharp as the cries of seabirds. Suddenly the harbour master's son handed the glass over to the oldest man there.

" You can see the peak of the sail, clear of the island ! " His voice quivered.

Then the youngest ran with the wind, crying to those he passed, " Malcolm is coming ! "

The five young women heard him, and four of them ran after him, leaving Peggy alone, as if the virtue of motion had been drained from her like the blood from her face.

" What ? " An old greybeard looked after the boy as though language were an invention whose meaning he had forgotten. But soon the news was among the crowd by the harbour.

No ! No ! There was a limit to what even Malcolm would dare ! But the news scattered them, some to climb towards the headland, others to press towards the outermost point of the quay wall. And on the faces of the old was fear that comes from the high foreshadowing of calamity, and on the faces of active men a quickening like laughter held in awful suspense. Eyes glistened and shot their glances at what was only half seen inside the mind.

At last the naked eye caught that peak of sail that looked no bigger than a shark's fin, could see it for an instant before it disappeared. But it came again . . . and disappeared.

Then there it was again. Now it was lost completely ; it was gone ! . . . But no, by the ancient gods of the ocean, there it was ! Malcolm was sailing her ! If ever a boat had a hand on her tiller, she had it now !

Men became restless. They stamped the earth. Their eyes shone, and the cold got behind their skins as if it were the cold of the winter storm.

Now the lifeboat could be seen wallowing and disappearing in the high seas. She was following the *Rose of Sharon*, standing by her. Whatever had happened in the lee of Rock Island, Norman was at his post. And what might have happened, grown men, knowing the ways of thought between Malcolm and Norman, did not allow themselves to think . . . yet.

Not that Norman could do anything now. He had enough on hand, lifeboat though she was. But he was there ; and what Norman could do, he would do with every last inch of him.

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But the *Rose of Sharon*—she was coming first, she was coming on her own, small and open and terribly vulnerable, and, oh, she was coming gallantly. They could see now her dark hull, could see her bow cocked up, before it slid back as if sucked under.

Then the schoolboy, who had raced down the slope with the news and who felt himself important accordingly, cried suddenly, for Angus was his hero, "Won't Angus and Willie be baling now!"

And some grown men laughed to relieve tension, and an old woman suddenly wept. For many a boat had fought out stormy seas, to be pitched and smothered on the bar. The end of the fight—the end, and it was coming upon them.

Practised eyes gauged the depth on the bar by the way the great waves curled over and crashed. Too well they knew that, with sea room about him and depth beneath, a man can put up his fight with courage and design; but over the shallows of treachery the finest hand is useless. Yet even to this utmost pass Malcolm had not come blindly, not without knowledge of the end, for he had let the tide rise until now across the deepest part of the channel it was some two fathoms wide; the sea swung solidly on, leaving its extended arms to churn to froth on the bar.

Malcolm was coming straight for that swing of unbroken water, committed at last to the clear run through, making dead for the heart of it. They could see him clearly, his right forearm along the tiller, bending forward a little in an easy posture. But they could also see now, by the motion of the boat, the wildness of the storm, the awful heave and thrust and rush of the ravening, tumultuous waters. The crash of the ocean deafened them, and they cried against it silently from braced bodies, sending their spirits like indrawing saving hands to the three men sitting quiet and motionless in the boat.

All at once the *Rose of Sharon* was coming at speed, racing like a yacht, her trim forefoot cutting and cleaving, and then they saw the monstrous wave heaving up behind her. Silent voices cried in agony. The wave caught her like a piece of flotsam and flung her forward with great velocity, then swept right from under her.

Malcolm had missed it!—had lost that ultimate thrust of chance on which the greatest have to rely. He was broaching to; the next one would toss her keel up and over like an empty box.

Malcolm lay back a bit in some queer steadying motion of his own, as if talking to his boat, and the watchers saw that she hadn't lost way, that she was slowly answering Malcolm's hand, coming round, facing on, moving, getting ready, lifting her head.

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And a voice that did not know it spoke, roared, "Look out, Malcolm!"

But Malcolm did not even turn his head. For he could no longer avoid a drowning sea. All that was left to him now was to take advantage of it.

The great bank of water hit the boat and lifted her, and the nose of the *Rose of Sharon* went down, but she had her own way on her and her own clean lines; Malcolm held her to the wave, to the onrushing water, and the water took her in a great heave over the deepest part of the channel, across the bar, and as the wave slowly moved from under her she began to lift her head, and lifted it high.

As the wave outraced her and swept on, her head came down, dipping deep into the sea in final salute, then lifted once more to the normal level in the safety of the harbour basin; and still with her own way about her, she moved towards the harbour wall with a grace so simple and noble that many eyes grew blurred, looking at her.

A high sound like a drawn out sigh rose from those strung along the edge of the quay; here and there a woman's voice broke; there were no words for the wonder that had come upon them, for the relief and joy, for the gallantry of this old man of their blood who had fought death and conquered.

As the *Rose of Sharon* moved into the high wall, Willie glanced up, and his eyes were caught by Peggy's face. Perhaps its pallor, its strangeness, held him, for there was no movement in the features, though they were wet with tears.

She was staring at Angus, but Angus was looking straight into the wall, and when he caught an iron rung of the ladder that went up the wall, the battered *Rose of Sharon* swung quietly to his mooring hand.

Someone had to say something now, and the harbour master's pointed beard was weaving restlessly under the surge of his feelings. The boat lay directly below him and, looking down, he called, "Aye, Malcolm, I see you have a good fishing!"

It was the native stroke, and relief ran along the wall as if a trigger had been pulled.

Malcolm straightened his back and glanced up. "Fairly good," he admitted with a faint smile.

"We thought there was a bit of a sea running," called the harbour master, heaving from foot to foot.

As Malcolm turned seawards, a wave from the rising tide smashed clean over the quay point. "There's a bit of a lift in it," he agreed, using the local idiom for a quiet swell. Then he turned to unship the rudder.

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It was the kind of humour they loved. It was the way their legends were born.

But there was still the lifeboat, and as the crowd began to move from the wall, Willie handed Angus the stern rope. "Take this with you and make it fast, then hurry and give them a hand with the lifeboat. We'll be on your heels."

But Malcolm, the skipper, said no word, nor did he look at his son.

The lifeboat station lay between the quay and the headland, in a narrow hollow, with a slipway of its own direct into deep water. Thither now men were pressing, for manœuvering and hauling the lifeboat to safety would be a difficult business in the present state of the tide.

Ever since he had seen Peggy's face, Willie had been in an extraordinary condition of suppressed excitement, and now, as he fixed the sail, he said, "I have a confession to make to you, skipper. It's about Angus."

Malcolm turned his head and looked at Willie; his face went hard and his eyes the colour of the sea water.

"It never struck me," said Willie. "I clean forgot."

Malcolm waited, and Willie grinned, taking his time, as though held back by a very devil of mirth.

"After all," said Willie, putting a fist in the small of his back, "I might have thought of it; I should have, for I knew." Then because he also knew he dared not hesitate longer, he glanced at Malcolm. "Didn't you know?"

Malcolm neither shifted his eyes nor spoke.

"It was Norman. Angus did not want to annoy Norman. That's why he said he wanted to go on the lifeboat. Have you never heard that Norman has a daughter called Peggy?"

Willie saw Malcolm's lips come slowly adrift.

"Angus and Peggy: they're walking, and dancing when there's a dance going. I confess I could not understand the lad out yonder, for he has your own blood in him. Good Lord, he would sail us both under and not notice it! Didn't you know?"

Malcolm still stood for a little; then he sat down as if his legs had weakened, and Willie for the first time in his life saw the forearm that had held the rudder shake.

Willie bunched the fish, so that watching eyes might be misled as to their talk, then he added quietly, "You'll go and thank Norman?"

"Yes."

"I could dish out the fish as a present to the lifeboatmen, if you like."

"Yes."

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" I could give Norman the turbot," said Willie, his wild humour mounting dangerously in him.

" Yes, do that," said Malcolm, all with the solemn wonder and simplicity of a child.

And it was only then that Willie realized how deeply this man loved his youngest son, the only one of his three boys who had followed him in the ways of the sea.

As they crossed over the ridge and down to the slipway, the lifeboat, hauled by a mass of hands on the winch, was being drawn into her shed.

Men talked to Malcolm and tried to take a rise out of him, for humour now wanted to fly with the foam, and Malcolm replied, but with no edge to his words, as though the great struggle with the sea still dazed him.

Willie had got Peggy and Angus together, but was standing between them, for he knew they were too shy yet to face the public alone. " Watch your father now, and you'll see a bit of *real* courage." He laughed and turned to Peggy. " His father couldn't understand why this brave son of his wanted to come back on the lifeboat to please its skipper ! " He shook. " I had to tell him ! " His mirth reached for an outlet. " What a night we're going to have ! "

Colour flamed into Peggy's face, and she tried to look everywhere at once and succeeded in looking wildly beautiful.

And now there was her father, Norman, coming away from the housing, and fair in his path stood Malcolm. Norman had to stop.

Simply and sincerely, in a clear voice, Malcolm said, " I have to thank you, Norman, for standing by us." Then he put out his hand.

Norman looked at him and looked away, as though not seeing the hand.

All those who had lived through the desperate hours stood utterly still in that hollow of shelter behind the headland, watching Malcolm holding out his hand, and suddenly they knew, because of the greatness of the sea that was in the man, that he would neither withdraw his hand nor drop it until Norman decided on his course.

And with an austere sense of justice, some of the older men, aware at last of what had happened under the lee of Rock Island, knew that Norman was entitled to his moment, if to no more.

Norman's face came back to Malcolm's, and something of the grave peace in that face, with its friendly smile, must have touched him, for his hand came out straight, and there and then their two hands gripped openly and strongly.

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Instead of a cheer, a deeper silence ran through those who were watching, before they turned their heads away, their eyes shining, as though they had been witnesses to an ancient rite.

* * *

FOOD OF LOVE

Back to the times of moonlight serenades, gentle ladies singing duets or dipping and whirling to the strains of an old fashioned waltz. Can you recognize these ladies and gentlemen—the players and singers of yesterday? Count one point for the musician, one for the source and one for the author in each case. The answers are on page 105.

1. *She, being an expert pianist herself, was delighted that the architect liked music too, for her husband had never really appreciated this art.*
2. *" In spite of all their friends could say " they sailed away in a very unorthodox boat—whistling and warbling a moony song to the echoing sound of a coppery gong !*
3. *After a strenuous day filled with danger, deduction and endless difficulties he would frequently sit in his rooms—pensively playing his violin.*
4. *He was a gay young squire ! His clothes were embroidered as brightly as a meadow and all day long he'd sing and play upon his flute.*
5. *A piano was to him " a fine resource " upon which could be stored his complete collection of Balzac's novels.*
6. *This bear was fond of composing little ditties and often as he wandered abroad he would sing—just as his fancy dictated.*
7. *" I have no ear," he said. " I have been practising ' God save the King ' all my life ; and am not yet arrived, they tell me, within many quavers of it."*
8. *This prince, amid Tartaric scenes, wrote a lot of ballet-music in his teens—but " Oh ! that day of sorrow, misery, and rage " when his two starving minstrels played him a sonata—" let me see ! ' Medulla oblongata '—key of G ! "*
9. *A gifted trombonist, he was asked " to intone an Olympian diapason to the West Ham Salvation March "—while their leading lady told them the Army was saved, and saved through him !*

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THE PETO SISTERS

"I took her life," she said, "and lived it—for my own"

by A. L. BARKER

IT was odd to think they were both out of the same pod. Odd, yet commonplace, because everyone remarked on it. It was a family cliché. They were never called "the twins," any more than they were called Catherine and Chloë. It was Chloë and Catherine, always.

Chloë Peto was bound to come first. She had a damaging perfection, a fieriness which had nothing to do with temper. It was life she consumed, the ordinary days and years. She was like a flame in a dry thorn. And her beauty dominated; black and white and scarlet, a *sudden* kind of beauty.

Whereas Catherine was fair and rather sombre. At twenty she was plumpish, her hair a tolerable gold and her cheeks had the sound rosiness of apples. In herself Catherine was not a remarkable young woman.

The sisters were devoted to each other, and although it was only a reasonable suspicion that Catherine must be fonder of Chloë than Chloë of her, there were no grounds for it. Perhaps at heart they were twins and each had an equal share of warmth.

Nor was there a hint of jealousy. Catherine's delight in Chloë went far deeper than general adulation. She never seemed to tire of watching her, as if she marvelled that such quicksilver could be flesh and blood.

Yet there was one attribute in which Catherine outshone Chloë. But it was of no great importance among their friends and their father's friends, who hardly thought of holding it to her credit.

Catherine could play the piano. A few people were convinced that she had more than talent; they thought she had genius. I was one of these.

The practice I had bought was small and well-to-do. An older man, long established, looked after most of the smallholders and village people, so that my patients were comfortably off; they were not often sick, but when they were, they paid well and I had time to indulge in my passion for music. Even had I had one half of Catherine's powers I would have devoted my life to it. As a

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performer I was rather less than mediocre. I knew it as surely as I knew that Catherine Peto, immature and almost untaught, was potentially one of the greatest pianists the world has ever known.

I remember the first time I saw her. John Peto was down with a chill after a drenching in the hunting field. Catherine met me at the door and took me to her father. I thought her pleasant and dowdy. Like everyone else I contrasted her with Chloë whom I had already met.

I told her there wasn't much to do except keep the patient warm and quiet and that I would come again in the morning. She had little conversation, and I wondered what she did with herself. Chloë was constantly in London at house parties, or away for long weekends, but I had heard that Catherine rarely left home. She looked the sort of woman who would spend her life potting jam and walking spaniels in the rain.

Gradually I came to know her better. She was restful to be with, she was kind and an excellent listener. There was little else to be said, but she had a certain charm which it amused me to try to fathom. I never could, although I was pleased that my fancies had taken such a sensible turn. John Peto was very wealthy and doted on his daughters.

At an informal dinner party two months after our first meeting, I heard Catherine play.

I won't pretend to describe it. I was utterly unprepared; one or two people had said she played well and I was ready to hear her bounce through Rachmaninov and the inevitable Chopin. What happened to me while she sat at the piano changed my whole life. I can recall as if it were yesterday the sickening falling and soaring of my heart. And after the first five minutes not even that endured. Catherine's music cut me off from every twitch, every pang of my body, from everything but the emotions it compelled.

When she finished I still sat in my chair. People around me began to talk, and by degrees the patch of carpet I was staring at took on colour and shape. I began to see it and I remembered where I was. When I looked up, Catherine was explaining to her father how to make spruce beer.

Of course she wasn't perfect. She was very far from that; she needed teachers, discipline and practice—months, years of it.

But even so, she played as I had always dreamed of playing. She had the power and potentialities of the master; it was unmistakable, even after that brief performance. I questioned her about her music. She had no idea that she was any better than average and she had given up her teacher years ago.

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" It seemed silly for anyone my age to be taking piano lessons," she said, smiling.

The truth was there was nothing more the country town professor could teach her.

I made her play for me again when we were alone. I wanted to be very sure I hadn't been carried away by a chance dexterity or by a small, well studied repertoire.

She played for over two hours—Bach, Scarlatti, Mozart, Brahms. Sometimes I made the choice, sometimes she. And there was no mistake. She had both passion and precision, a miraculous instinct, transcending experience, transcending the cautious and the calculated. She had genius.

I told her so.

" That's what Chloë says." She pressed her finger on a speck of dust, smiling.

" Chloë ? "

" She likes to flatter me." The steady blue eyes looked curiously at me. " I never thought you would."

It wasn't easy to persuade Catherine Peto that she had the makings of a great concert pianist. It wasn't easy even to make her admit she had dreamed of it since childhood. Hardest of all was the task of driving her to realize the dream.

For me the undertaking had an intensely personal significance. The girl's power seemed as much mine as hers—because I had discovered it, because I coveted it, because I loved her. A kind of fury possessed me, I knew I should never rest until I had driven that music out of the damp Dorsetshire drawing room into the concert halls of Europe.

Is there any bitterness comparable to that of the man who has all the compulsion, conflict and fortitude of a great artist without one assuaging spark of genius ? It requires courage to admit mediocrity and to abide by the admission. The ten years since I abandoned music for medicine had atrophied neither the compulsion nor the conflict and what I planned for Catherine Peto I planned as an appeasement for my own sake.

Once Catherine herself was convinced, the hardest task was over. Opposition could come only from John Peto.

He asked me to dinner and I knew what he wanted to talk about as soon as I realized there were to be no other guests.

Chloë had arrived unexpectedly and the house rustled as it always did when she was there. Catherine had eyes for hardly anyone else. Sometimes she seemed to hunger for sight of her sister and those sombre moods of hers had a touch of sourness. Only Chloë could sweeten her then.

Old Peto came to the point at once.

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" Cathy wants to play the piano. But she always has played, and damned well. Why start this commotion to get her to play better ? "

Chloë said, laughing, " For the very good reason that anyone who plays as well as Catherine owes it to everyone to play better."

" Poor girl, what a debt ! " Peto peered humorously at Catherine. " It will be very nice for us, but I can't guarantee we shall *all* notice the difference."

" I don't think you realize," I said, " that by then Catherine would be playing at concerts all over Europe."

" Cathy on the stage ! " He turned to look at her. " Well, who would have thought it."

Catherine went to London to study. She took lodgings in Knightsbridge and I visited her as often as I could. She worked hard, happy even in the drudgery. The day wasn't long enough she said, for her needs.

About this time I asked her to marry me.

She looked at me steadily, without pleasure or confusion. " Will you wait for my answer ? "

" How long ? "

" I think—a long time. Until after my first concert."

I was bitterly disappointed. Marriage would have given me the indisputable right to watch and direct her. I wanted to work with her, hour after hour, day after day, month after month. I wanted my head to throb, my body to droop with weariness. I wanted the labour and the monotony and the despair because I wanted, finally, to go on the concert platform with her. I wanted to play as she would play—when all the professors in Europe would have nothing more to teach her. For me it would be triumph at second-hand, yes ; but could any other hand be more nearly mine than hers when once we were married ?

Besides, I wanted Catherine. It was the same desire for possession. Again and again I urged her to marry me. I even neglected my practice to be with her in London, but she always made the same reply, that there could be no decision until after her first concert.

Sometimes Chloë arrived and the dingy rooms in Knightsbridge came to life as suddenly as the house in Dorset. The difference between them grew more pronounced; there was something grotesque about it. When they were together, Catherine was not even the shadow of her sister. She seemed to be another substance entirely—a heavy, crudish clay. Yet apart from Chloë she had a ripe comeliness. Those sombre moods overlaid a passion which Chloë could never sustain.

The pleasure they took in each other's company had nothing

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to do with common interests or the pungency of opposed ones. It had begun before birth I suppose—an intense participation in each other. Then every spark in Catherine was diverted and she was content to put forth Chloë as wood puts forth fire.

Chloë did not disturb my plans because she was as ambitious for Catherine as I was. Neither of them took any part in the other's life except for these occasional visits. Chloë had her friends and her parties, Catherine had her music. It was only when they were together that I could no more get possession of Catherine than I could of a cloud. There was nothing to be done about it, except to make their meetings as infrequent as possible, and that I would undertake when we were married.

Meantime, Catherine made progress. Impatient though I was I could find no fault with the way she worked. As a doctor I even wondered if the pace she set herself was too fierce. One day she played a single phrase over and over again. It seemed to me perfect, but some inner ear of hers was not content. She went on working until I felt raw at the constant repetition. I put my hand over her wrist. "When will you be satisfied, Catherine?"

The question went deeper than I intended. She looked past me to the window and the rusty bricks beyond.

"Never," she said with extraordinary bitterness, and I did not know whether it was from her music or from her whole life that she expected so little rest.

That same afternoon Chloë came with a tall bun faced young man. His name was Cobham, George Cobham. He was a farmer, and watched Chloë as a big lordly dog watches its owner. Occasionally he took his pipe out of his mouth and grinned for pure joy.

Chloë was in love with him; she made that clear. Every now and then she lightly stroked his cheek and fitted the tip of her finger into the cleft of his chin. And the great creature sat there looking at her with an appetite as frank and unabashed as something out of his own farmyard.

"Only think!" cried Chloë, whirling on Catherine. "George is going to marry me before he gets his new thresher. I was terrified he'd make me wait until after that."

"Marry you?"

"Yes, marry me—and we're going to have seven children. Seven!" She stood on tiptoe, arms outstretched in a kind of ecstasy, not only for the sons and daughters, but for all the mornings, noons and nights of her life, the poverties and pleasures and every moment of the years that were hers. Catherine pulled at the sleeves of her stretched woollen jumper as if she were cold.

At Christmas the Peto sisters went home. Chloë and Cobham

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were always together, and they filled the house with guests; there were balls and parties all the time. Catherine had invited no one. She was tired and abstracted, and hankered after her work. Whenever I went to the house she came to me with relief and we talked about music and her plans for the future.

She seemed quite rootless now. Her father and her home, everything which had occupied her before, hardly touched her. The sight of Chloë and Cobham together upset her, so that she did not care to stay long in the same room with them.

I thought it a promising moment to ask her again to marry me. She hesitated, but once more refused to give an answer.

Three days after Christmas, Chloë was killed.

I did not hear the story from any of the Peto family until years after. John Peto, who had been a big noisy old man, was shocked overnight into a silent senile creature with no taste for life and no trust in death. Whereas Catherine was changed beyond my belief.

It seemed that when most of their guests, including Cobham, had gone, the sisters went for a walk together along the cliffs. At Buckle Head, Chloë's spirits were so high that she ignored Catherine's anxiety and ran to the edge, looking down at the shore. Just here the earth is slack and constantly crumbles quietly into the sea; Chloë was gone even while Catherine cried out to her to keep back. They recovered her body just as the tide began to lift it from the rocks.

Old Peto was in need of my care, and I visited him several times. Catherine refused to see me, and after the inquest and the funeral she shut herself away. Nobody saw her. To my letters she returned the brusque answer that her plans were changed and she was giving up music. A month after Chloë's funeral she went away, leaving her father's sister to take charge of the house and the poor aimless old man.

No one ever knew exactly where she went. She rarely wrote home; a letter came from Paris, one from Rome and one from Madrid. She did not write to me at all. Six months passed, and then one evening when I came in from my round of visits, my housekeeper told me that Catherine was back.

I had flattered myself that I knew Catherine. Why shouldn't I? Who else, apart from Chloë, had any inkling of what went on in her mind? She had no intimates, no friends. I alone knew that within her silence and stolidity she held a bud of incomparable music. I was positive that as soon as she had got over the shock she would turn again to her work. What lasting difference could Chloë's death make to anyone like Catherine who had a genius able to transcend personal tragedies?

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I went with confidence to the Peto house, but was told that Catherine was tired after her journey and could see no one. Next day and the next I met with other excuses, and I was forced to realize that she did not intend to see me.

At first I was angry. I had only contempt for Catherine's female frailty, and was so filled with impatience and frustration, I believe I would forcibly have taken her away had she appeared. But she took care to keep out of the way, and I went home to think it over.

When I was calmer, I understood that I must be ready to wait. I might even have to start at the beginning again. Those depths which gave power to her music also gave power to her grief, and I decided to leave her alone for a week or two.

A few days later I received an invitation to a ball at the Petos'.

I remember that evening as I dressed, being curious, and surmising. The ball was soon after Chloë's death, and it was unlike Catherine to want such a thing at any time. It might be her violent way of stating, once and for all, that the season of mourning was ended. Perhaps she had some idea that Chloë would wish it. But whatever the reason for the ball, I thought it an excellent idea. I should see Catherine and find out how the land lay.

At the last moment I was called out to a patient, and it was late when I arrived. The old Peto house was ablaze with lights, dancing had begun and the music echoed across the park.

As I went up the steps, a man came out on to the porch. He staggered as if he had had too much to drink. I watched him lean his head against a marble column and take out a cigarette. When the match flared up in his shaking fingers, I saw it was George Cobham.

Couples were waltzing in the ballroom. No use looking for Catherine among the dancers. At Chloë's parties she could never be persuaded to take more than the briefest, clumsiest trot once round the floor.

Old Peto came over to me. His evening waistcoat, which used to be stretched perilously, hung loosely on him. He shuffled about like a harmless old domestic animal. When I asked after Catherine, he looked vaguely behind him and shook his head. I sat down to wait till the dance was over, when I would be better able to search for her.

Then I saw her.

Ghosts always come in the flesh. They look from an eye, speak in a voice, make a gesture with a hand. Is there any other haunting one need fear, vapours or rappings that can torment like this? That night I saw two ghosts, Chloë's and Catherine's.

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True, Catherine had no right to a ghost, but the woman I saw at the ball was neither one sister nor the other. There was Catherine's yellow hair, her long lidded eyes, her heavy lips. But those rather solid shoulders which she used to hide under woollen jumpers were bare, as Chloë's would have been; jewels glittered at her throat and wrists where Chloë would have worn them; her dress was as brilliant and daring as anything her sister might have chosen.

Furthermore, she was dancing; whirling round and round with her partner, laughing, flirting, the gayest, liveliest creature in the room. It was a familiar gaiety. So, too, was that ardour which I thought I should not see again after Chloë died. It was incongruous and, to me, terrible.

The dance ended and she came towards me. I could not tell where Chloë ended and Catherine began. They were not divided as they were in life; they were so dreadfully mingled that I could have sworn they both were dead.

She saw me, and stopped. For a second the animation died, the gaiety faded—it was wholly Catherine who stood there, bulky and ill at ease in her splendid gown.

"Well, Catherine," I said.

At once there came a change. She held out her hand to me, smiling with easy pleasure.

"Why, Jack—how nice to see you."

I bowed. "An indulgence you've not permitted yourself lately."

"I particularly wanted you here tonight—there'll be something to interest you later."

"My interest is in talking to you. Do you realize we've had hardly a word together since Chloë died?"

She stiffened, looked at me in anguish, and turned away. "I've been very busy."

She avoided me for the rest of the evening. Her dance programme was full, she said; and, indeed, it seemed to be, for she danced unceasingly. Young men surrounded her. I was not surprised; she was making them welcome, and she would be quite a comfortable heiress with Chloë's share of the Peto money added to her own.

Fascinated, I watched her. I forgot to dance, I forgot to drink. I spent the time wandering round to find vantage points for a sight of her. At any moment I expected the illusion to end and the Catherine I knew to creep out of the ballroom to a corner by herself.

At eleven o'clock the orchestra played a crashing chord or two to summon attention, and old Peto was helped on to the musicians'

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platform. Standing there in front of everyone, he put up the back of his hand to still his mumbling lips, and then in his thin, quavering voice announced Catherine's engagement to George Cobham.

There was an audible gasp from the guests. Less than a year ago old Peto had stood there to announce Chloë's engagement to the same man.

Catherine and Cobham came on to the platform. She was radiant, he still a little drunk, his eyes moving like a shifty bull's.

The applause died down, and people pressed forward to congratulate them. I took Catherine's hand and said, "Congratulations on the discovery that a dead woman's shoes fit you better than your own."

A few weeks later I left Dorset. It was thirty years before I saw Catherine again.

I don't say that my life was blighted. It would take more than Catherine Peto to do that. Only my expectations were changed. Music and fame were not for me, not even vicariously. Having realized that, I found that the life of a country doctor was not for me either.

I signed on as ship's surgeon, and for most of the following fifteen years I had fathoms of water under me, the waters of the oceans—Pacific, Atlantic, Indian; and the seas—Caribbean, China, Yellow, Black, Baltic, Tyrrhenian, Ionian, Adriatic, Arabian. I didn't go to seed, there is too little of the degenerate white in me, but when I began to feel too old for the chopping and changing, the heat and the rawness of life at sea, I settled in a house outside London, and there I have been ever since.

I'm sixty now, and I still hanker after something I can never do. To make great music—I was born for that, born with the desire and without the capacity.

Yesterday I went to see Catherine. Why? Partly because I was curious, partly because I had just been to a concert. How many times, I wondered, and in how many places, had I thought about the Peto sisters? But I never came to any conclusion which satisfied me.

At the concert I heard a new pianist. She could play well enough, but she had no warmth. Hers was proper, precise music, and I thought how Catherine, half taught as she was, could have bettered her there.

I had a feeling she must still be at the old Peto house, and so she was. The park looked bushier than I remembered, and the old pebble cobbled drive had been replaced by ginger gravel. Was it always such a bright house, with so many sparkling windows? It hurt my eyes to look at them.

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A crowd of young people with tennis rackets came out on to the porch. One of them bounced a ball against the column where George Cobham had leaned his head thirty years ago.

Yes, Mrs. Cobham was at home, and when I sent in my name she came with hands outstretched to greet me.

Once again I was shocked. Old men are always affronted when their age is reflected in their women. Catherine must have been fifty five; that thickness of hers had become what is politely called "magnificence." Her great thighs and broad shelving breast were emphasized by her silk afternoon dress. Her heavy hair had thinned and been fluffed out with curling irons, her full cheeks were threaded with little red veins.

She was flustered by my visit, and hurried to and fro until the tea was brought, and then settled down thankfully to pour it out. I asked after Cobham. Yes, George was well; he'd gone to a cattle show. Of course I hadn't seen the children?

"I saw some young people going to play tennis. How many children have you?"

"Seven. You know I always said I'd have seven."

"It was Chloë who used to say that."

She gave me a look which I could not interpret. "What a memory you have."

"I remember you used to play the piano." I glanced at the Broadwood grand. "Do you ever touch it now?"

She held up her plump ringed fingers and shook her head, smiling. "Angus, my eldest son, plays very nice dance music."

"And you never regret giving up your music?"

That went home, and she seemed hurriedly to cast about, trying to summon up an excuse. Her hands blundered among the silver.

"You never told me why you changed your mind thirty years ago. Why did you, so suddenly?" The colour beat up under those tiny netted veins. "Don't you think that of all people I have a right to know?"

She did think so, and it filled her with panic.

"I had great hopes of your future, or I would never have urged you on as I did. You could have been a front rank pianist. You see, you had something to give the world—very few people have that. And, do you remember—we were going to be married?"

"You asked me to marry you," she said faintly. "I didn't give you an answer."

"Don't you agree that I have a right to know?"

"Yes, you have a right. But it's difficult." She played with the spoon in her saucer. "It's difficult—"

"Sometimes you regret it, don't you? You regret giving up

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your music and the fame you might have had. That's it, isn't it ? "

" No ! " she said sharply. " I don't regret anything I've done. You mustn't think that. I've had thirty years of happiness ; how could I regret them ? But there's one thing, and I want you to know it's the only thing I've had to torment me in all these years. I've tried not to think about it, but it's hard always to be on guard. When I'm tired, or not well, I can't stop my thoughts."

In the silence came the faint thud of a tennis ball and the cries of the players. She had that hazed look a woman has when she sips tea and remembers.

" Are you going to tell me what is this thing that worries you ? "

" Sometimes I can't help wondering what my life would have been like—the life I would have had. That's what troubles me."

" What do you mean—the life you would have had ? "

" Why, *my* life. It would have been mine if I hadn't taken Chloë's."

" Catherine, my mind is not as quick as it used to be. I don't understand."

" I don't see how you ever will," she said sadly. " But I must try to explain. When Chloë was killed I felt it was partly my fault. You see, I was there with her, and yet she died. I ought to have stopped her ; I ought to have saved her—"

" What more could you have done ? "

" Oh, anything, anything ! " She moved restlessly from her chair and went over to the window. " I could have held her hands, clung on to her. I ought to have run in front of her rather than let her go near that edge."

" How could you possibly know she was going to do anything so foolhardy ? "

She said heavily, " No, I didn't know. One minute she was there, laughing at me ; the next, she was gone." She turned to me. " I don't expect you to understand, but in those weeks after Chloë's death I had the most agonizing feeling of life being cut short. I first felt it when I stood on the empty cliff, in the sun, every drop of my blood knowing that she was dead. She seemed to have left her life behind her. I felt it with me, like a separate thing. But day by day it lost strength, it withered, it was dying. Can you understand the pity of that ? "

Catherine's huge form came and stood between me and the light. " I took her life and lived it for her. I knew everything she meant to do ; I knew how she would have done it. I married George and became a farmer's wife, as she would have done. I had the seven children she wanted to have, and I've lived as she would have lived, shutting out nothing that came, pleasure or pain. The only pain I have tried to spare myself is in contrasting my

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own life with the life I took—with Chloë's. You see, all this "—she made a gesture with her hand towards her home—" and George, and the children, are not really mine."

" And that was why you abandoned everything we were working for? You had this notion, this fantasy, this—God in Heaven!" I cried, " Chloë had no life! She had nothing to live for and she knew it!"

After a long moment, Catherine said, " I think you will have to explain what you mean."

Now I regretted losing my temper, but it was too late. I would have given worlds to have got out of that room without another word.

" Chloë was ill. She came to me just before she died and asked me what was the matter with her. She was afraid some minor thing had gone wrong which might stop her having children. I examined her, and she saw by my manner that it was more than that. She gave me no peace; I had to tell her she had six months to live."

Catherine was black against the light. I peered up and could not see her face. One of her hands, which had twitched all the time she talked, now hung like lead.

" She had something very rare in anyone so young," I said uselessly. " But by the time she came to me it was useless to operate. I thought she would have told you."

There was a long, long silence. The sunlight crept tuft by tuft across the deep pile of the carpet; from fathoms away came the lively thud of the tennis ball. Catherine did not move, and I had ample time to regret what I had said and to curse the selfish rage which made me say it. Perhaps, I thought, I had better go, leaving my harm behind me.

Catherine's hand began to twitch again; lightly, delicately, the fingers pressed, tested each other.

" No," she said, " she didn't tell me."

She went to her chair and clumsily lowered herself into it. Now I could see there were tears in her eyes. She let them roll down her cheeks.

" How she would have hated this. The only thing she ever minded for herself, the only thing she never had to bear, was pity. She went over the cliff rather than endure it." She said fiercely, " You didn't pity her, did you?"

" Chloë was no object of pity."

One of Catherine's tears fell into her silk lap. After that there were no more. She sat looking silently down at her clasped hands.

Suddenly a man's voice sounded loudly in the hall. Catherine started, then smiled—the smile one sometimes sees on the face of

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a girl hearing her lover's voice, but rarely, if ever, on the face of a middle aged woman.

" It's George," she said.

As she began to dry her cheeks, she looked across at me with a calm radiance.

" I've lived my own life, after all."

* * *

THE CROW AND THE ORIOLE

Once upon a time a crow fell in love with a Baltimore oriole. He had seen her flying past his nest every spring on her way North and every autumn on her way South, and he had decided that she was a tasty dish. He had observed that she came North every year with a different gentleman, but he paid no attention to the fact that all the gentlemen were Baltimore orioles. "Anybody can have that mouse," he said to himself. So he went to his wife and told her that he was in love with a Baltimore oriole who was as cute as a cuff-link. He said he wanted a divorce, so his wife gave him one simply by opening the door and handing him his hat. " Don't come crying to me when she throws you down," she said. " That fly-by-season hasn't got a brain in her head. She can't cook or sew." " Tush ! " said the male crow. " Pish ! You are simply a jealous woman." He tossed her a few dollars. " Here," he said, " go buy yourself some finery. You look like the bottom of an old tea kettle." And off he went to look for the oriole.

This was in the springtime and he met her coming North with an oriole he had never seen before. The crow stopped the female oriole and pleaded his cause—or should we say cawed his please . . . which made her laugh merrily. " You sound like an old window shutter," she said, and she snapped her fingers at him. " I am bigger and stronger than your gentleman friend," said the crow. " I have a vocabulary larger than his. All the orioles in the country couldn't even lift the corn I own . . ." " I don't see how that could interest anybody but another crow," said the female oriole, and she laughed at him and flew on towards the North. The male oriole tossed the crow some coins. " Here," he said, " go buy yourself a blazer or something. You look like the bottom of an old coffee pot."

The crow flew back sadly to his nest, but his wife was not there. He found a note pinned to the front door. " I have gone away with Bert," it read. " You will find some arsenic in the medicine chest."

JAMES THURBER, *Fables For Our Time*

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COME DANCE WITH ME

She could dance more skilfully than an honest woman need . . .

SALLUST, 86–34 B.C., *Catilina*

A piper in the streets to-day
Set up, and tuned, and started to play,
And away, away, away on the tide
Of his music we started ; on every side
Doors and windows were opened wide,
And men left down their work and came,
And women with petticoats coloured like flame.
And little bare feet that were blue with cold,
Went dancing back to the age of gold,
And all the world went gay, went gay,
For half an hour in the street to-day.

SEUMAS O'SULLIVAN

Masquerade

Then came other masqueraders, smaller but no less fearsome, displaying top-heavy hybrid masks with tusks, horns, Evil Eyes, chalk-white faces and grotesque mouths. Some had paint-smeared torsos stuck with chicken feathers, others coverall garments of striped stuffs which flapped into mittens on hands and feet. Cowrie-shell leg bracelets, raffia garlands and stiff straw skirts, mirror lockets and bangles rustled and tinkled as they struck haughty or clownish attitudes. Some masks were topped by totems with caricatures of snake, crocodile, elephant and leopard in *bas* relief. All were surrounded by drumming, whistling, jigging attendants one of whom fanned the Juju through a vent just below his mask when the all too human African within signalled that the atmosphere inside his costume was stifling beyond the bearing of man or spirit.

The other dancers, all men, stamped and shimmied endlessly while the orchestras blew and banged out a tireless, faultless syncopation on log drums, iron cymbals and wooden flutes. Their whirling black bodies glistened with perspiration which trickled unheeded down their rapt faces. Dust stirred by pounding feet hazed the air, sandflies bit and the orchestra's rhythms took on a louder staccato tempo, a minor-keyed, pulsating spate of raw jazz which assaulted the eardrums and intensified the afternoon's blanketing heat. Even the children joined in the stamping and shimmying, following in the wake of their elders with infantile

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but exact traditional gestures while the onlookers threw coins into the arena of the exuberant entertainment.

Mopping our faces we strove to maintain smiling concentration despite the soporific sameness of the drumbeats, the dust grits between our teeth, the trickling perspiration down our backs and the hypnotic, repetitive weavings and stampings of the rhythm-intoxicated dancers. Hours later, since the celebration showed no sign of wearying, we came away. That night I dreamed of the Big Juju's red-rimmed eyes, and the hybrid heads . . . and woke uneasily past midnight, to hear the tomtoms still sounding.

ISOBEL RYAN, *Black Man's Country*

For Saynte Charite

I am of Irlaunde,
Ant of the holy londe
Of Irlaunde.
Gode sire, pray I thee,
For of saynte Charite,
Come ant daunce wyt me
In Irlaunde.

Author Unknown

Dragon Dance

Had I not been born in China I could never have dreamed of the gay and fanciful entertainment known as the Feast of Lanterns . . . After New Year's Day, as the Feast approached, lantern sellers would be busy in the streets . . .

The dragon lanterns, beautifully constructed of bamboo covered with thin silk, varied in colour: there were red dragons, yellow dragons, green dragons, black dragons and white dragons. Each lantern had to be borne by from thirteen to fifteen people, of whom these at the head and tail needed to be experienced players. The head was usually big and heavy; it might contain as many as fifty or more candles; and besides managing these the person who held it had to be skilful in the dragon dance.

This was performed in each house visited if there were big empty grounds. Four people, each dangling a light red silk ball, pranced in front of the dragon lantern. As a ball moved, the dragon pranced after it in an attempt to catch it. This way and that waved the balls and the whole long dragon swung after them. To enhance the excitement, the men taking part shouted, and the musicians who accompanied the show thumped, blew and twanged their instruments as loudly as possible. The greater the noise, the faster the dance. It was the merriest game I saw in my childhood . . .

CHIANG YEE, *A Chinese Childhood*

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Dance Macabre

What godly eye can it delight,
what pleasure in it dwell,
Which is the line that leads to vice,
and hedlong unto hell?

THOMAS LOVELL,
A dialogue between Custome and veritie, 1581

Moonshine

My grandmother has often told me of fairies dancing upon our green, and . . . the moment anyone saw them and took notice of them, they were struck blind of an eye. They lived under ground, and generally came out of a molehill . . .

They had fine music always among themselves, and danced in a moonshiny night, around or in a ring, as one may see at this day upon every common in England where mushrooms grow.

Author Unknown, Round about our Coal-fire, 1730

The Fiddler of Dooney

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,
My brother in Mocharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:
They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on the three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With 'Here is the fiddler of Dooney!'
And dance like a wave of the sea.

W. B. YEATS, 1865–1939

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THREE DOGS OF SIENA

It was an exhibition of outrage—cold, deliberate and unexplained

by WILLIAM SANSOM

THE Italians love their dogs. And their dogs love the Italians—it is probably to show something of this love that these dogs take such care to reproduce themselves, not in the dull matrix of formal breed, but in a most brilliant assortment, in a profusion of wild and unpredictable shape ever a surprise and a joy to their delighted masters.

What we would call the " mongrels " of Italy are more than an essay in democratic procreation: they are an unceasing pleasure to the eye of those who love the individual, the purely creative rather than the creatively pure, the fresh. Not only joy but genius distinguishes this variety. Nowhere but on the ancient peninsula famed for its fecundity in noble and inventive works could such hounds occur.

One day three such dogs arrived in the Tuscan town of Siena. So full of joy and industry were these fortunate dogs, that in everything they preceded their masters, running always forward, smelling out the fresh ground first. Their names were Enrico, Osvaldo and Fa, and they came from Naples, Genoa and Venice. They were owned by three brothers resident in those cities, who now had come to be reunited in Siena, the town of their birth, for the wedding of their younger sister. However, names are poor descriptions for such dogs. They must be studied in all particulars, observed in the detail of their spectacular creation. First, Enrico.

Enrico was a dark brown dog, almost Umbrian—though he came, in fact, from the yellow Neapolitan quays. Stoutly built and heavy, he was not tall enough for his broad body, though muscular legs supported firmly this solid barrel. The brown hair grew short in tough whorls on his back, but down from his chest and stomach it hung sternly shaggy.

His face was Enrico's great glory; it was nearly the face of a mandrill. Thick snouted, bristling with what at first seemed disapproval, it proclaimed the thinker, yet a tough thinker, ruminant but muscular for the fight. His eyes were pale liver coloured, with bluish rims that circled them completely; but very often one could

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see nothing of his eyes, nor could he himself see quite where he was going, for a heavy shag sprouted from between two small pointed ears and sprang forward in a wave like one great bristling didactic eyebrow. In a curious way this eyebrow seemed to part as it fell on to his snout proper, and to either side it combed away, becoming a beard to drink up Enrico's strong slavering.

At the other end—it was a good way—there occurred the stump of a thick rat-like tail bent backwards and curled up sharply to its bitten spatulate; this revealed perhaps too boldly a bare posterior, hairless again as a mandrill, and not too well looking—but possibly this was not Enrico's fault; possibly he never knew quite how it looked, it was so far away.

Fa came from Venice; his fur was white as his native Istrian marble. He was a fluffy dog, always laughing. At first sight one took him for a Pomeranian; he had all the powder puff fur and bright black eyes, ever pricked ears and slender trotting legs. This at first—but then as in a dream, or in some distorting mirror, one saw that all these pretty characters were strangely exaggerated; the white fur sprouted like a clown's frill; the little legs spun so thin and delicate that in motion little Fa seemed to travel on wheels; the inquisitive ears rose inches high, like paper squills. But his tail was Fa's greatest pride; instead of a fur ball, this joyful member flowered into a high spreading fan, beautiful but overweighted as the sail of a felucca, and as such very helpful with a following wind.

However, Fa's was perhaps mostly an eccentricity of character. His laugh, his perpetual busy trot, his ever bright eye and his spirited soprano bark singled him out always as the life and soul of any street, a true lover of life. He liked often to walk on three feet. He was so called after the fourth phonetic of the singing scale, having arrived at a similar stage in a litter of eight.

Osvaldo—Osvaldo could claim in his way to be the finest of the three, if one spoke of earthly finery, of the feathers that make the bird. A big dog, by and large Osvaldo had grown to be the shape of a hyena—his front shoulders rose several inches higher than his tapering thin haunches. But such haunches never slinked; Osvaldo was no cur. That slendering was meant for speed. In other ways, too, he seemed contrived for speed; his long wolf-like nose thrust streamlined forward; his ears grew huge and round, the trumpet ears of a flying fox; his grey body was covered with tan coloured spots, so that such a fur had some of the look of feathers, like the feathery pelt of some griffin beast from a wilder world; and his tail fled away in a long streak.

But Osvaldo's eyes! His eyes were bright yellow—as yellow as a leopard's! These it must have been that gave him, for all his

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speed, such a strange impassive expression. Never the glimmer of a laugh, never a message of anger could be sensed from that motionless face. One never knew what he thought. He seemed away on the far horizon. Genoa had been his birthplace.

The three had first met in Florence, where they had become instant friends. Florence had been selected as a convenient junction for Siena, and a most pleasurable few hours must there have been spent between the platforms and a nearby restaurant. They had then taken an afternoon train for Siena, a train of good wooden carriages, and had arrived after dark. So that on their first night in the hill town the three dogs had not had the chance to see anything of their new home—though the journey in the fading summer light had offered many pleasing prospects. The dark lines of cypress outside Florence had proved interesting, a pleasant strolling place where many enquiries might be satisfied.

Then, as the earth turned redder and Siena approached, there came the strange perspective of the vines, each planted singly, twisted helter-skelter figures, intertwined and loving, but statuesque, arrested in movement and in no way disquieting to the interested dog. But to Siena itself they arrived enclosed in the dark carriage; it proved quite a drive from the station to the higher town walled on its crest of hill. They had spent the night comfortably enough enclosed in a small yard.

The next day dawned warm and sunny; the air was filled with fresh smells from the good Tuscan earth. This not only proclaimed the joys of country life, but indicated also that there had been a day or two's rain recently—so now the weather would be fine. Good weather, then—and a new town to explore.

At last the gates were opened and the three friends stood sniffing on the threshold of their new adventure.

But not much time was spent standing still! A second only for three noses to appraise the air, a glance to left and right, and they were racing off. However, as is often the case, that first dash was little more than its explosive gesture; in fact, they all ran in different directions, noses to the ground, and instantly circled back to the gateway. It was a ritual, and now fleet Osvaldo, betraying in his yellow eyes nothing of his intentions, took charge and wheeled the party off along the road to the left, uphill. Mandrill-faced Enrico plodded his muscles behind. Little Fa became a brisk third, though sometimes he ran forward and completed a circle round Enrico. They travelled at a lively trot, searching the side walls as they went.

The road led steeply upwards between tall houses of red brick.

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It was narrow, a kerbless street of a kind they must all have known; the cobbles met with clean precision the dark red perpendicular of the walls. But, for a time—such indeed was the precision of the Sienese mason—one might have thought this the precinct of some well ordered private mansion. No debris littered the stones, no stones nor brick nor plaster had fallen from those well kept walls. Nor were there any projections of any kind, no doorsteps, doorposts, lamp posts, trees, nothing that might invite a pause.

Then shops occurred, and shops could never occur in private passages. But such ordered self-contained shops! What sort of town was this? They grew uneasy. As the industrious file plodded on, they passed not a single bin, no brushed pile of refuse. The sober red bricked mediæval streets wound narrowly up and down, arched and turreted, with never a buttressed invitation; not grim, but richly grave and cleaned as no town they had ever known.

Frowning behind his forward hair, Enrico must have remembered the alleys of Naples, redolent of life and all odour. Osvaldo's fox-like ears would have trembled to the unheard echo of the bustling Genoese arcades. Small Fa's great tail fanned blindly for the warm resistance of all those exudations that thickened the air above the green canal by which once he had lived.

But what was it they sought, truly, bowling along at such urgent speed, sometimes on three legs, sometimes cavorting dangerously sideways, frisking and plunging, yet always continuing forward, in what was plainly an agreed single file, with searching nose and rolling wary eye? Certainly it was not, in the main, food. Nor was it another matter that, with such stores as they had retained carefully for this expedition, must have weighed heavily. It was something deeper. It was without doubt the need to find evidence of their own existence.

This they could do only through the help of others. The search for food is automatic. But the urgent cry for testimony is a different affair. A dog alone in a stone street might well wonder whether he existed, the suspicion that he was no dog could breed dangerously among the dry mirrorless stones. What proof was there? To glance down at a paw, to whip round one's head at a remote, diffident tail? What did that prove? After a moment of illusion, of pleasant relief . . . nothing. Naturally one's dog brain attributed to itself paws and tail, fur and flank; but—how be sure that this was no deception? Impossible. Proof must be sought elsewhere: it could be found only in the movements and essences of others, the clash with unfamiliar bodies and with feelings foreign to one's own intimate brain. These others were at best other dogs, but other creatures would do—cats, men, and in a more distant fashion the rats and small bodies of one's prey.

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Suddenly Osvaldo stopped dead, feathery front legs splayed stiff, his fishlong snout sniffing upwards, yellow eyes peering at the wall above, fox ears primed for intelligence. Enrico and Fa bowled to a halt and stood quivering. But they never looked up. Instead they gazed from side to side, sometimes glanced anxiously at Osvaldo, but above all pretended not to notice anything extraordinary. Here was etiquette—a pronouncement would come in good time. They stood like dogs that pause suddenly in the middle of a game, panting, abruptly indifferent to each other.

High up on the wall was set a stone tablet. Sculptured in relief, Osvaldo saw the effigy of a large woman-dog with sow-like udders nourishing two naked human children who squatted beneath. He stood peering curiously. What could this mean—were the dogs here magically transformed into humans, was it another feature of this strange town? A glint of unease showed in his yellow eye as, turning his long nose away in embarrassment, his fixed pupil revealed a thin crescent of the bluish white. Romulus and Remus, ancient colophon of Siena, sat drinking above, impassive, cherubic, unconcerned with the passing of new wolves.

One has seen dogs pause in question before mirrors; or grow startled at the sight of an unaccustomed object—a parasol, a tall hat. Some bridle at the phantom of blue spectacles, others growl at the movement of a rag flying in the breeze. What in fact do they see—what do they *know*? Their eyes are alert, the finest intelligences are cocked in their ears—a certain uneasiness underlies.

Perhaps an instinct, long lost to our human systems, perceives emanations of evil. We know that such instincts exist, as with the polarization in a dog travelling over unknown distances back to a former home. Or perhaps once it has been frightened by something looking the same—though in this case such a selection is queer, it balks at a parasol and disregards a walking stick, and this only on certain days. Or does a keen appreciation of the angles of light, which again we have lost, describe around the object an abstract image of some unfavourable beast? Certainly the dog that sees himself in mirrors, and only in certain mirrors, behaves as if this might be so. He does not imagine, as we do, that he sees himself. It is more likely that he suspects the presence, the significance, and so the threat, of an alien that bears upon his own life. From his mood, his cautious sniffing and startled eye, he shows not outright alarm but suspicion and unease. So Osvaldo looked up at Romulus and Remus. He must have known the wolf was not real, but he had his suspicions; he felt unsure.

And if this indeed were the case, what bewilderment Siena held in store for him! What a distracting plethora of porcupines and elephants, giraffes and unicorns and all those others that form the

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signs of the seventeen Sienese districts, and which everywhere are emblazoned in chivalric colour on the red walls. But, of course, this was not to be—though much worse threatened these unfortunate dogs. For the moment Osvaldo gave one deep growl and then—as dogs will—suddenly lost all interest. He appeared suddenly to forget what he was doing, and glanced curiously at the street itself, waking from a daydream. Then wheeled and was off at a trot. The others tossed their heads, seemed to jump as excitedly as if this were the first intimation of a walk that they had ever received, and followed. They disappeared round a corner.

In a town as small as Siena, we who moved constantly about the marvellous streets of course kept meeting other such industrious walkers. Those three dogs seemed to occur everywhere. More than the little girl with the birdcage who gave out printed fortune slips, more even than the mournful young man with a black eye who must have been much knocked about in the recent Palio.

The Palio, a furious horse race galloped in mediæval costume round the Campo of Siena, had been over a week. The crowds had departed, the tempers of the various districts or *contrade* that competed had cooled—for this annual race was as fiercely contested as it was picturesque; it was no show for tourists, but a traditional trial of strength between the *contrade*, as alive now as when first, centuries ago, it had grown into being; the jockeys with their round helmets thrashed each other as freely as they thrashed their ponies, bribery and tricks and competitive tempers rose high.

But now the parades, processions and pageantry of the great day were a week over—though there still remained certain ceremonies to be completed. Now and again one saw bands of Sienese dressed in mediæval clothes come drumming up the streets.

Contrary to what might have been expected, this distinctive people dressed up so, carried no feeling of the operetta: they looked real, conclusively. In their stripes and scalloping they marched against walls of dusky red, dark old true walls—each man's face was a face seen in a mediæval painting. The brownish, ochreous faces were unchanged, and in themselves they were as distinctive from other Italian types as, for instance, are the people of Arles from others in South France. A feeling of pride and fine breeding is sensed. And here they lived in a town that was as preserved as their traditions and their own bodies. A town austere but mellow, kinder than Florence, yet, as with many such mediæval cities, resonant with the sense of death. Well preserved in its graven self, and also well kept from day to day . . . its clean stone streets contrasted strongly with the streets of other cities.

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One wondered, again idly, what the three dogs thought about it. And soon, as if we had called them, though the town was really too small to count it a coincidence, they appeared, suddenly racing down into the main square, the shell shaped Campo.

Industrious as ever, they travelled fast, noses to the ground, heads tossing, tails and behinds wagging separately like the after-bodies of ants or rumba dancers.

That was their way of coursing the streets—but here, here suddenly striking into the magnificent open ground of the Campo, they skidded to a halt, stupefied. Enrico and Osvaldo stood sniffing the space like incurrent lions, while small Fa bounced to and fro between them, a small tug between those larger craft.

What—whatever could be going on in such ever searching minds? Had they seen and stopped stupefied at the sight of the seventy or eighty marble posts that ringed the course of the Campo? Had such sudden generosity in this reserved city overwhelmed them? Had Enrico glanced up for a moment at the blue sky and seen rising, rocketing up against it, the tremendously high campanile? This delicate square tower of dark red brick, so slender in proportion to its needling height and the vertiginous pale castellations bulging heavily at its far summit—this most beautiful erection of man that seemed ever to be moving upwards, which seemed in fact to be flying, rocketing, spearing itself in vertical flight into the wheeling heavens, this so vertical tower that gave us a glimpse that the world is round—what did it signify to Enrico's liver coloured eye, suspicious through the hair-mop? Could his wondering, almost intelligent mind have registered its proportion, so that it appeared to him as a giant pillar, an exquisition too great for him, but of the right shape and thus innately satisfying?

Worldly as he must be, Enrico turned his head down again to the cobbles, the nearer posts of rough stone that ringed the Campo—but there might have been a glimpse of understanding in that second's attention, a possibility that was borne out by what later we were to see, in the episode that finally unseated these furry ones.

Now, they hastily addressed themselves to the first of the posts, and then continued round the fan of the race track, rehearsing their own intimate Palio. Unspoken words seemed to circulate between them. No barking, but rolls of the eye, while Fa's black jets gleamed with a dark, clownish radiance—rolls of the eye that seemed instantly to be understood, indicating a different direction, and above all a call to industrious, joyful, companionship.

Episodes and encounters marked their progress. Here at the hub of the town more was likely to happen; although the Campo itself, because of its curious tilted shape and its quiet historical recession, seemed always more deserted than other Italian squares.

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Nevertheless at one point Enrico, running along, was seen suddenly to wheel; he returned nosing to what he had nearly passed—a scrap of ham rind left like miraculous manna by the sweepers.

Now he settled his mouth down to the scrap, and with mournful eyes began to eat. As he munched, the pupils were raised thoughtfully, showing a lugubrious droop of white beneath, and those whole eyes, stricken with the conscience of sin, moved slowly from side to side. He was like a man weighed with sorrow—or a child doing what he knew was wrong. In some curious way he seemed to be listening to his stomach. It was notable that this was the one occasion when the news of a discovery was not circulated to the others.

But the others! The others had found at last a brother animal; not one, but two, a brother each. Osvaldo had found a cat, and Fa had looked up suddenly to find a dog sitting almost invisible in a dark doorway. Fa abruptly stiffened, shocked, outraged. He raised his small self to what he must have imagined was a monstrous size. On the points of his paws, on inexorably stiffened legs, with neck erect and eyes implacably averted, he walked up and down quivering in front of this sitting Sienese dog. It was an exhibition of outrage, cold outrage. The Sienese, fat and well groomed and almost well bred, took no notice whatever.

With Osvaldo it was different; perhaps because his meeting was with a cat. And such a cat—fat, sleek, striped, heraldic! The dogs of Italy do not chase cats like their brash northern brothers. There was no reason for the cat to do other than continue to sit and gaze across the Campo with imperturbable placidity that must have seemed remarkable to the excitable Genoese. That huge dark striped cat, in the erect posture of some heraldic beast, simply sat and considered the Campo. Osvaldo stood opposite, his head hung, his paw half raised, blinking his yellow eyes uncertainly. In Genoa the cats were lean and thin jawed; their kittens were as meagre as large mice. Nothing was more different than this well fed, gloss coated monster.

But in neither case could anything be done; the Sienese animals made no move whatsoever. Finally, Osvaldo turned away, shaken, from his cat; and Fa made longer and longer circles away from his dog, so that soon he could appear to walk away naturally, unconcerned. Enrico alone had profited, and that not overmuch—the rind had been tough and salt.

Such, then, were the minor encounters of these three eager lovers of life. Before the following day, we saw them again twice: once down by one of the town's gates, down past a long pink wall surmounted with leaves green against the blue, where one saw the

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town end unencumbered by suburbs, and the gentle dark ribbed patchwork of the Tuscan fields map out to the horizon beyond; where those dogs had found two other dogs making love, and, as dogs will, were circling the indifferent couple with excited sallies and a jabber of barks; animated as the chatter at a tea party on the mention of human love.

The next day they found it. Some time in the late afternoon we were at the hotel window, looking out on to a road junction, the lanes running at different levels that pleasantly complicated the view. Of these, the main road was embanked, and thus passed slightly above eye level from our window, while a short gully of steps descended from it to the lower street beneath.

Presently, as if it were a matter of course, the three dogs came pounding in their ceaseless single file up the lower road. And at the same moment, from along the upper road, came the sound of a kettledrum and marching feet.

The dogs heard it, erected their ears, faltered and stopped. From where they stood they could see nothing of the upper road, they could hear only the marching feet, which now came to a halt, and the kettledrum which began a long, mounting, death-like roll.

They stood there listening, but it was plain they did not like what they heard. Enrico and Osvaldo stood with tongues lolling, panting quietly, heads lowered, listening; Enrico's shaggy forehead appeared furrowed with thought, listening for some unpalatable truth; Osvaldo searched blindly with his visionary eyes, but his lowered head seemed to be waiting for the whip to fall. Fa stood erect, tremendously rigid, his small pink tongue pouting forward.

Meanwhile, we could see what in fact continued on the upper road. A group of the Porcupine Ward, the Istrice, had come marching with flags towards their votive church and had stationed themselves there to perform a *sbandierata*, a flourish of flags.

The drummer had planted himself, feet astride and firm, in the centre of the road. With implacable elbows he drew from the drum its ceaseless coil of sound, ever more rigid, ever growling out a greater power. Four or five of the others had stationed themselves at intervals along the road. These men carried standards, flowing white flags of great width, upon which were emblazoned patterns and the dark effigy of a crouching porcupine: these flags they twisted in the air with graceful mastery. Each man wore a parti-coloured black and white mediæval jacket and hose; each wore a mediæval cap, and showed thus underneath a grave clear-shaped mediæval face; the quarterings and stripes of black and white, splendid colours of the dark red city, showed bravely against walls of that ubiquitous dark burning.

In all its principal elements there was nothing in that scene to

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suggest that centuries had passed. Suddenly, in front of one on the everyday street, in the sunlight, was flashed the flesh and blood mediæval happening. The clothes did not behave as stage properties; muscles rippled within them and the bodies were filled with true blood.

With strong grace they wielded the heavy flags, twisting and furling and swinging them above their heads, hanging back against their weight and deftly manipulating their hands in a music of equipoise and inspired motion.

The huge banners swam through the air like coloured winds, like bubbling swathing smoke beautiful on the moving air. Fiercely toothed patterns sprang into being, vanished in a sweeping furl.

All the large flags and their staffs were tossed suddenly high up, as if they themselves leaped, hesitated in the upper air, sank down more slowly into the hands of the standard bearer. Then again great circles—and still from the drum a constant drumming which never ceased. It seemed as though the flags themselves were alive and trying to wrestle away like wild birds from their athletic captors. It was a battle between flags and men.

Windows had opened, heads had appeared. Several passers by had paused to watch. But these did not disturb the truth of that scene, they themselves were the anachronisms, a drab intrusion upon the splendid brick and the bright designs of livery. The pageant succeeded: a small gilt procession will triumph over mundane crowds—but here, by how much more was their success achieved! Then, of course, we saw that other intruders were at work. The dogs. Osvaldo was climbing the steps.

He took one look, drew back crouching—gave a whelp of fright, and loped shivering down the steps, tail between trailing legs. The others looked at him sharply, sadly.

A pause for reflection, for necessary indecision. Then carefully, slowly, with a hesitation that never quite asserted itself, the three of them, no longer in single file but abreast, climbed the steps. Below the very last step they stopped, and stood there furtively pointing their noses over the top, as if it were a parapet: small Fa had to raise himself on two legs. Six uneasy eyes flickered with distrust as they watched the flags; one recognized the germ of hysteria. What they saw could not have been flags, but great wrestling coloured shapes pouncing on the wind, zooming low over the men that fought them. Nothing quite like that had been seen before, except, though much smaller, in the shape of birds.

Were these, then, giant birds of fierce colour that had descended in droves upon the town, sharp of beak and horrid eyed? Remorseless, lidless, steel eyed birds? Eagle giants to tear out the vitals, thrusters and squawkers, great feathered bolts of muscle and iron

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claw, divers and risers, vile destroyers of gravity? Bones and feathers and cruelty—but as for feathers, one could not quite see, they flickered and furled so swiftly: were they snakes, was it fire, or worse—animated sharp toothed cloths, living cloths headless and limbless, savage with consuming life, unclean and unknown? . . Whatever this was, it had never before been seen; it was dangerous. And there was no smell.

On rolled the nerve searing drums, the dogs stood still, poised to move in two directions at once. They were stretched, by their legs and tails lowered and moving backwards, by their noses extended forward to draw in the air with anxious sniffs. Their eyes showed the white; and because they were interested and therefore lively, appeared again most considering, wise, intelligent. Patricians' careful eyes they cast on those unearthly flags; and then, as nothing happened, they took courage.

Enrico, as if he were taking the pipe from his gruff and bearded muzzle, gave a low growl. One could not hear this for the drums, but the sound could be seen vibrating his body, one lip raised. And Fa, propping himself alongside, heard it as a sign, realized the mounting of confidence, and quickly, in his excitable way, raised his muzzle in a peppering of short white barks. Osvaldo continued to stare with nerveless yellow eyes, and then presently he, too, raised his long nose and set up a long, unbroken howl.

The flags swooped and tossed, bellied and swirled in the rising *sbandierata;* the drummer's elbows held their noise in an iron grip; the dogs mounted their howls and barked in chorus. But a deadlock is never satisfactory for the lively ones. One cannot stay still; any action is preferable, backwards or forwards. And these three dogs from the sea could no longer contain themselves.

Buttressed with barking, their confidence rose, and suddenly, as one, they raced forward at the nearest flag. It was circling low on the ground; they tore at its swiftly moving swathe, and got their faces soundly lashed. For a moment they were lost, enveloped, blinded in a fog of silk; then up fled the great banner and circled thrashing at the higher air; the dogs crouched dazed, and then they were leaping at it, throwing themselves high, snapping, snarling, barking their last breath.

They looked then like three sacks erratically bouncing, Fa's white ball moving faster but lower than the two larger brown others. Ears well back, eyes quick with long white fury, teeth open, they gathered themselves and leaped at the enormous bird threatening from above. This was no plaything; they fought hysterically.

One knew it instantly when, for a moment, the flag circled lower and menaced, with no illusions of dogged valour; for a second they cowed back, guarding themselves . . . and meanwhile

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the standard bearers plied their flags; they had no time in their exertion to watch the dogs. Nevertheless, the ritual of the *sbandierata* dictated that soon the banners should descend. The dogs leaped higher.

The Italians love their dogs as they love life, but they also love ceremony, and in all ceremony there is the touch of death. The will to live may also be the will to die. Whether it is a rite of harvest or marriage or church, death resides somewhere in the pomp, the order, the finality, and what is always a sense of immolation. All life for the time is suspended; a pause in living comes to revere the solemn act.

The drummer suddenly shook his head to one of the people watching. This man took the message and dashed forward, doubled up, to kick Osvaldo sharply on his bony flank. Osvaldo gave a yelp, looked round astonished at this man, hesitated, and wondered why he had been attacked; was he not in battle for a brother man against the dangerous bird? And then receiving another kick, slunk sorrowfully away to the side of the street. Enrico was dealt with similarly. Small Fa saw what was coming and followed.

They sat in a doorway, framed by the severe stone lintel. Their eyes glanced with apprehension at the drummer; at those watching; the kicks had not hurt, but the meaning was absolute. Sometimes their heads turned to the flags and revolved with them. In a nearby doorway sat a Sienese cat, well fed, tranquil, heraldic. It seemed at last that Osvaldo, Enrico and Fa had assumed something of the same sedentary pose. They seemed to be considering the fatal words: "Perhaps it is time to settle down . . ." Contentedly to die.

When, a minute later, the *sbandierata* was over and the drumming group marched away and was lost along that narrow street, they were still sitting there. Life, it seemed, was over, trotting was done. No more now but to sit in doorways; to sit and wait. Calmly to await the cold breath. They had been touched by the city, they had been permitted to see beyond the veil. No more to do but wait, satisfied, content, half dead already.

* * *

NO OVERTIME

Although he was still so young, Christian Bérard had often been asked to write his memoirs. He was told it was his duty to do so. He replied: "My pleasures and interests are so numerous that I really cannot be expected to find time for my duties!"

From *The Tatler and Bystander*

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THE RING

A heavy moor mist can certainly cause some awkward situations

by NORMAN EDWARDS

WHENEVER I mention the name of the village where I was born, people tell me I am lucky not to live there any more. I don't argue; but I'm sorry I have to earn my living in a city, because life in my village is far more interesting.

Now I ask you, where in a city could you meet a man who has spent part of a night in the company of three pixies? Sam Wry did, once. And it's an experience that changed the whole course of his life: which is just as well, because Sam Wry might have come to a bad end if he hadn't met those three pixies.

Of course, it happened some years ago, when I was only a lad, but my memory is as good as ever it was, and I can tell you exactly what happened to Sam the night he got lost when the mist was heavy on the moor.

Mind you, Sam's memory is not so good these days, and so perhaps if you happen to meet him his story may not be exactly the same as the one I'm telling you now. But by and large, I'm pretty sure the facts will be the same—and it's the facts that matter when it comes to telling you about the queer things that can happen in my village.

I was not in our local the night Sam gave his farewell party, but I heard all about it afterwards from my father. He related it at great length, for he was a man who enjoyed celebrating, particularly when the party was at the expense of anyone saying farewell in pints.

I remember my father telling me that Sam Wry was very generous and that the party was a great success, much enjoyed by one and all.

Sam had decided to join the Navy, and he was due to catch our local bus the next day at twelve o'clock in order to get to the nearest railway station, about ten miles from the village.

My father said that Sam was quite sober at closing time, because they helped one another into the street and said good night a great number of times before they separated. My father said he had to make his way home very gently because one of our heavy

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autumn mists had rolled up from the moor. These make it difficult for folk, because my village is on the edge of the moor, and the mist is sometimes so thick in the street when the local closes that some fellows have been known to kiss each other good night instead of their sweethearts. All of which only goes to show that a heavy moor mist can cause some awkward situations in my village.

My father did not feel very well when he woke up the next morning, and quickly came to the conclusion that the mist had got into his lungs. He decided the only sensible thing to do was to stay in bed and let the farm look after itself—with me doing the hard work.

But about opening time my father had an idea that the best way to get the mist out of his lungs was to wash it out, and so, at his generous invitation I accompanied him to the local. Then I had to buy him a pint, because he'd left his money on the dressing table in his bedroom. He was frequently leaving his money on the dressing table, especially when he invited me to go out with him.

Well, we noticed at once that the mist was still very thick, particularly at the end of the road which leads across the moor; and it was lucky we knew our way blindfold to the local, because it is very nearly twenty yards from where we live.

When my father had started the long and difficult work of washing the mist out of his lungs, and I was sipping at half a pint of cider, our local vet joined us.

"Have you seen Sam this morning?" he asked my father. "It's getting on for half past eleven, and his bus leaves at twelve."

"Haven't set eyes on him since we left here last night," said my father.

"Nor have I," said George Law, the landlord. "If you asks me, Sam's still abed. With a fat head to keep him company."

Harry Sickle, Tom Long, and several other men present, laughed at that, and the vet conceded freely that George Law was probably right. They decided it might be just as well if Sam missed the bus and forgot to join the Navy, because his capacity for liquor was enough to sink a whole fleet, let alone one ship.

But just as we'd all finished laughing at what the vet had said, the door bumped open and in came Sam Wry. His appearance was such that one and all stared at him.

Now in those days Sam Wry was, in the first place, a hot tempered chap who didn't like being contradicted; and in the second place he was six feet three inches tall in his socks, and weighed fourteen stone; and in the third place he was a dangerous character—particularly if he was drunk. But that morning—I can see him now—Sam was sober; and there was a look on his face

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which struck us all as amazing. Furthermore, Sam was dressed in his best suit for going away in ; but a tramp would have refused it as a gift—free, gratis and for nothing—because both the jacket and trousers were torn in places by thorns. And, because it was very damp, the suit had shrunk in places so that it gave Sam Wry a quaint, not to say ridiculous, appearance—particularly about his ankles and cuffs.

Without so much as a civil good morning, Sam went to the bar, leaned on the counter, and looked meek-like at George Law.

" Double whisky," whispered Sam. And at that our vet jumped up and went to Sam thinking, quite naturally like, that Sam was ill, and that a little vetting might help him.

Well, to cut a long tale short, Sam said he was not ill but just plain upset. He was upset, he said, because of a very remarkable experience he had had out on the moor the night before.

" Out on the moor ? " asked our vet, amazement showing quite clearly on his face. " What were you doing out on the moor last night in all that damp mist ? Surely you can do your courting in a more salubrious atmosphere."

" I wasn't courting," muttered Sam. " And don't you go suggesting unpleasant things about the atmosphere I choose, either."

" No offence intended," said our vet in a soft sort of voice. " But," he continued, " it is painful to me, and to all your friends here, to learn that you endangered your health in the damp mist on the moor last night, and if you will allow me to prescribe, I think another large whisky, paid for out of my own pocket, is just the correct medicine."

When Sam and all of us had recovered from the shock of this bountiful generosity, the tongue in Sam's head began to get the effect of the whisky, and he explained how he had lost his way in the mist the night before.

" The mist got me all muddled up," admitted Sam, " and after I'd walked for a bit without coming to my front door, I stood quite still and tried to think where I'd got to.

" I must have stood still too long, because quite sudden like my legs gave in and I fell down ; and then, as I rolled over, damp heather caught in my whiskers, and I knew then that I had misdirected myself and that I was on the moor, away from the road, and probably lost for ever and ever if the mist lasted a long time.

" It was this terrible thought that started to make me feel upset ; but why you see me even worse upset is because of what happened to me after I had been reclining on my face in the damp heather."

Sam paused ; and when the pause looked as if it would stay for

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ever and ever, George Law sighed a big sigh and offered to buy Sam a large whisky. Whereupon the pause ceased, and Sam answered a question our vet asked him.

"What happened that made me worse upset?" repeated Sam, with a queer look in his eyes. "I'll tell you; something stumbled over me and fell into the damp heather and began sobbing as if the gates of Paradise had shut in its face."

Now although Sam was a churchman by upbringing, he was generally regarded to be not so good at religion. Indeed, no one in my village had even so much as seen Sam go near a church, let alone in one. So when Sam crossed himself we one and all knew that Sam was telling the truth to the best of his ability, of which I am sorry to say there was not a lot.

"After the sobbing had discontinued itself," went on Sam, "and had become loud sniffs and heavy sighs, I recovered from the tremendous surprise I had received; and just at that moment the mist cleared a little and the moon above shone a thin pale light on me, and I could see close beside me a—*pixie*."

Our vet slapped his tankard on the bar and stared intense like at Sam; and for that matter we one and all stared at Sam; and then at the third double whisky George Law had put into his glass.

"What did you say, Sam?" asked our vet.

"A pixie," answered Sam in a low voice. "One of the Little Folk. A very small one, too."

"How small?" asked my father.

"About two or three feet small," answered Sam, civil like, because it was my father who once saved Sam from an inconvenience with the Police by saying he had not seen him with a snare in Four Acre Spinney.

"That's smallish," admitted my father.

"What did it look like?" asked George Law.

"Quite pretty, in a small way," said Sam. "It was dressed in a sort of cloak—a brown cloak—and its hair was long and a sort of gold colour."

"Did you see it plain?" someone asked.

"'Course I did," said Sam shortly. "It were real, like all pixies, but it being so small there wasn't much of it to see. But when it sees me, it gives a sort of yelp, as if it were frightened, which perhaps it was, because pixies aren't supposed to be seen by human folk like us, and that is why, as is truly known, pixies are shy, and only come out of their hiding places when it is dark."

"That is true," says George Law; and we all nodded agreement at Sam, which must have surprised him considerably on account of him being very difficult to agree with when drinking in our local, or anywhere at all for that matter.

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" Go on, Sam," said my father, who was very interested in what Sam had to say, as indeed we all were, " go on, what happened next ? "

Sam gulped down his drink and pushed the glass up and down the bar, and so I bought Sam another double, just to help him along with his unusual narrative.

" In order to stop it being frightened, and running away, I kept very still," went on Sam, " and I could see that the pixie would not run away because it was curious about me—just as curious about me as I was about it.

" So, after a while, I speaks to it, very gentle like. ' I hope you feel better now,' I says. ' A good cry does help sometimes—at least so my mother said, for I am not much of a one at crying myself, except when the liquor makes me too happy.'

" And this speech I made to the pixie struck her—did I tell you the pixie was a female pixie ?—the speech I made struck her interested like, for she sat up and stared at me shyly.

" ' Yes, thank you,' she says in a soft little voice that was like the whispering you hear when the starlings hold company, ' yes, I feel better, thank you very much ; and what you say about a good cry is very true indeed, and I am certainly relieved, and not anything like so upset ; although goodness only knows how I am going to find my way home in this distressing mist.'

" And the pixie looked at me very unhappily, and I knew then that I was talking with a pixie lady who had got herself lost.

" ' Surely, ma'am,' I says, ' you can't have got lost very much, as you are living on the moor.' And I said that cheerfully, just to cheer her up.

" ' Oh,' she says, ' I don't know this part of the moor very well ; and when I ran away it was not misty like it is now.'

" Then I knew that I was in the company of a lady pixie who had run away from home, so I says, ' I am sorry you have run away from home, for there is no place like it, as my mother—God rest her soul—often informed my father when he returned after the local closed.' ' Oh,' says the lady Pixie, ' I have not run away from home, only from my husband, because he was accusing me of carrying on with his best friend, a thing no lady with my pedigree would do.'

" ' Oh, if it's your husband you have run away from,' I says, ' I expect he will come looking for you.' ' Not on a night like this,' she replies, ' because my husband and the others have made camp ; and my husband likes his comfort ; and in any case I cooked his supper before I ran away.'

" But just as the lady pixie said that," Sam said in a hushed way, " I heard a voice quite near crying ' Pansy, Pansy ' ; and then

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another voice, also quite near, crying 'Hello, Pansy, where are you?' And the lady pixie jumped off the damp heather. 'That's my husband,' she exclaims in her starling voice, 'and that other voice is his best friend, of whom, as I told you, my husband had suspicions.'

"And at that she lifts her head and cries, 'Alfie, Alfie, I am here.' And in a few moments two other pixies come out of the mist."

Sam started another pause as he lifted his glass and frowned at the few drops that remained; but when our vet asked him to repeat the name of the lady pixie's husband, Sam banged the glass on to the counter and looked annoyed like.

"Alfie," he said, sharply, "and the name of the friend was Pado—so it sounded when I was introduced."

"Oh," said our vet, "so you were introduced?"

"Yes," said Sam, looking at our vet in surprise. "I was introduced as a gentleman friend of Miss Pansy; and then we all sat down in the heather while Alfie told his wife how very sorry he was for having wrong thoughts about her and his great friend; and Miss Pansy told them how I'd kept her from feeling too lonely while she was lost in the moor mist; and how I had lent her my jacket to put over her shoulders to keep her warm; and how my sympathy had done her so much good that she was willing to forgive her husband and go back home with him.

"Well, Alfie was very glad to hear that his wife had forgiven him, and as he had put a flask of pixie wine in his pocket before setting out with his friend to find Pansy, he said we all ought to think of our health and drink some of the wine to keep the chill away. And so we all had a drink—and very wonderful wine it was; it made me glow in my toes, and then in my stomach, and then in my head; and while the wine lasted I felt better than I have ever felt in my life.

"When at last Alfie got up and helped Pansy to her feet, and said that they must start for home, I felt so sorry that I nearly cried myself. And, in fact, Pansy did cry; and she clung to my hand and said she would never forget me. And she took a ring off her finger and gave it to me to keep as a souver—something—the name I misremember, and then she said I could kiss her goodbye. And her husband very kindly said he didn't mind, as he would get all the kissing he could deal with when he got home.

"And so I kissed Pansy, and she kissed me, and her lips were so small and her kiss so light it was like a ladybird on my lips. And then Alfie and his friend shook hands with me, and arm in arm with Pansy they walked away into the mist, leaving me to finish the pixie wine. Which I did very soon; and then I dozed

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off; and when I woke up the mist was thinner, and I could just see the road. And so here I am after a very strange experience out on the moor."

"You say she gave you a ring?" asked our vet, after the long silence that followed Sam's story.

"Yes," said Sam, "and here it is."

And, after fumbling in a waistcoat pocket, Sam pulled out a ring and put it on the bar counter. We crowded round and stared at the ring—which seemed so small that George Law wouldn't believe it was there until he had put on his spectacles. But it was there—a tiny ring that was plain in shape like a wedding ring.

Our vet got out a magnifying glass from one of his pockets and gave it a long look. "It's a ring," he said at last. "And made of gold. May I pick it up, Sam?"

Sam nodded; and we all watched our vet closely as he looked at the ring through his magnifying glass.

"Why," he said after a very long stare, "there is writing on the inside. I can just make it out."

"What's it say?" asked my father. "Is it in English?"

"It says *For Pansy*," said our vet in a very slow voice. And he put the ring back on the counter as if he were a bit scared of it.

And for that matter we were all a bit scared of it, for the ring was so small that no finger of any girl we knew could have worn it.

At last George Law took a deep breath, and pulled out a pencil from the drawer under the bar; the ring just slipped over the pencil. But only just.

"She must have been very small," remarked my father slowly.

"Very small indeed," agreed our vet. And we looked at Sam and then at the ring, and then at each other, and we didn't know what to say; and George Law filled Sam's glass again as if Sam had given an order, which he hadn't, because he never opened his mouth except to swallow the whisky the moment George Law put the glass in front of him.

And Sam spluttered a bit as he swallowed the whisky, because the local bus came clattering along the street and pulled up outside; and, as is known by one and all in my village, Tod Soames, the driver, is no dawdler and waits for no one, unless it be a pretty girl.

So Sam slammed his glass on to the counter and dashed to the door.

"Keep it for me till I come home on leave," he shouted at George Law.

And just as the bus started to move, Sam climbed aboard, leaving us, without so much as a farewell, to join the Navy; with not even a round of drinks paid for out of his own pocket.

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Well, we sat on in the local looking at the ring and talking about Sam's remarkable experience for an hour—or maybe it was more than that—when suddenly we heard a great noise in the street as if it were market day and cattle were being driven in from the farms. And it not being market day, we were very surprised, so our vet opened the door and looked out to see what was going on. And when he opened the door we saw that the mist had greatly cleared, and that passing along the street from the direction of the moor was a very strange sight indeed, consisting of four elephants, two camels, dozens of ponies, and dozens of caravans and wagons.

And sitting on the front seat of one of the wagons were three people, who waved to us as the wagon rolled by. And suddenly we saw written in big red letters on the side of the wagon these words—

PANSY, ALFIE & PADO
WORLD'S SMALLEST DWARFS

Now in the village where I was born a circus is always welcome, and that circus was talked about for weeks afterwards, because of the dwarf Alfie getting drunk in our local one night and accusing his wife Pansy of having pawned her wedding ring. And I remember the terrible things Alfie said when George Law put the ring Sam had left with him in front of Pansy and asked her if it were hers. A sensation that was.

But that sensation was nothing to the sensation in the village where I was born when Sam Wry's mother had a letter from Sam saying that because of his meeting three pixies on the moor he had given up drink, *and* swearing.

* * *

NOTHING BUT THE BEST!

One day Whistler, the famous artist, sent an urgent message to Sir Morell Mackenzie, eminent throat specialist, asking him to call at once. The specialist hurried to the artist, anxious to diagnose his complaint. He was chagrined to find that Whistler had called him to examine a sick dog. However, he said nothing, pocketed his fee, and drove away.

Next day, Sir Morell sent urgently for Whistler, asking him to call immediately. When the artist arrived in haste, the specialist said in a brisk businesslike voice, "How do you do, Mr. Whistler? I'm glad you have come. I wanted to see you about having my front door painted."

Magazine Digest

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NO WEEPING TONIGHT, BACCHETTA!

"At least," he said, "there is one genuine Stradivari among us"

by JOSEPH WECHSBERG

ACCORDING to an Italian travel folder, Cremona, the two thousand year old town on the plains of Lombardy, is noteworthy chiefly for its gastronomic specialties, such as butter and cheeses, mustard and sausages, marmalade and *torrone.* But to people who play, collect, or simply like violins, Cremona has a different appeal, for it happens to have been the home town of the world's greatest violin makers, among them Nicolò Amati, Guarneri del Gesù, and most celebrated of all, Antonio Stradivari.

The Cremonese school of violin making was established in the middle of the sixteenth century, by Andrea Amati; reached its peak around 1700, and ended in 1883, with the death of Enrico Ceruti, the last master in the great Stradivari tradition. During these three hundred years, Cremona gave to the world most of what are still its finest violins, violas, and cellos, and also a number of legends and mysteries, especially concerning Antonio Stradivari, of whom practically nothing is known with absolute certainty except the names of his two wives and of his children and the date of his death.

One might expect to find a few landmarks of past glory in such a town, and it was with hopes of this that I arrived in Cremona late one afternoon not long ago, during the course of a trip I was making through Italy. The Piazza del Comune, where my bus stopped, was dramatically lighted by the setting sun, and the shadows were already deep black between the Gothic and Renaissance palaces.

It seemed a perfect setting for the making of fine violins, and as I stepped down on the magnificent stone-paved square, I suppose I felt not unlike a pilgrim.

A piercingly shrill noise interrupted my meditations. It came from a loud speaker above a radio shop and turned out to be the voice of Carmen Miranda singing *South American Way.* A group of elderly loafers wearing cape-like garments round their shoulders—such as I remember were always displayed by the chorus in Verdi's

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Rigoletto, the story of which takes place in Mantua, only a few miles from Cremona—viewed my violin case with complete indifference, as if they knew what it contained—which was a good, old Italian violin, but not a Strad by a long shot. They seemed interested, however, in the labels of two New York hotels on my suitcase; and one decrepit party, evidently the town's major linguist, greeted me in English with the words " So long," asked me for half an American cigarette, and recommended a nearby hotel, the Albergo Impero.

" It is very good bathroom," he said.

Whatever the quality of the Albergo Impero's bathroom, I learned upon entering the lobby of the hotel that there would be no hot water in it until Saturday. It was then Wednesday. I was told this by a black-haired girl with cold eyes who was seated behind the reception desk, and who, aside from asking me for my passport and volunteering the information about the bath, seemed disinclined to talk. After she had handed me a room key, I asked her a question that I had been wondering about during my bus trip to Cremona: Was there anybody by the name of Stradivari in town?

" Sorry," she said. " I'm from Mantua. I've lived here only three years."

Just then, an elderly, severe looking man, whom I took to be the manager, came to the desk, and I asked him whether some members of the Stradivari family lived in town.

" There is that advocate," he said gruffly. " I think he belongs to the family. The address is in the telephone directory. Hand over the book, Camilla."

With that, he turned and strolled away. The girl did as she was told, with apparent reluctance. I found an Amati in the directory and ten people by the name of Guarneri, among them a shoemaker, an undertaker, and a marmalade-and-jam salesman, but none engaged in the making of violins. Under " S," I came upon: " Stradivari, Mario, *avvocato*, Via XX Settembre 4."

I asked the girl how to get to Via XX Settembre. She didn't bother to answer but merely pointed vaguely.

Near the hotel, I came upon a street that was crowded with people, who were gathered round a number of street stalls in which, spread out on large tables, were heaps of cheese.

The merchants presiding over the stands wore white aprons and looked prosperous and well fed, which was not surprising since they were continually sampling their own and one another's wares.

I asked three or four people how to get to Mario Stradivari's

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house. None of them seemed ever to have heard of the name, but they were able to direct me to the Via XX Settembre, a large quiet street behind the Cathedral.

No. 4 was an old house with a Renaissance façade and grilles in front of its ground-floor windows. There was a big plaque proclaiming a *dentista* and underneath it a smaller one, which read, "AVVOCATO MARIO STRADIVARI."

I opened the door and stepped into a big room, where a girl was sitting at a typewriter. It was easy to see that I was in an attorney's office. There were shelves filled with leather-bound law books, statutes, and pandects, heaps of subpoenas, writs, and affidavits—all the frightening paraphernalia of jurisprudence, which I've come to loathe ever since I spent some of the best years of my life in a legal office in Prague.

The girl stood up and asked me what she could do for me. She was pretty, although I couldn't see much of her, for she was wrapped up in a sweater and a long black apron. She was also wearing overshoes. I noticed then how cold it was in the room and that her breath was visible. After a couple of false starts, we found that we could get along fairly well in an improvised mixture of Italian and French. I said that I wanted to talk to Avvocato Stradivari, and the girl said that he had gone to M ntua for the day but had promised to be back on the six o'clock bus.

"If you can rely on him to catch it," she said, and laughed. "You know him?"

I replied that I didn't.

"Oh, you don't?" she said, and shook her head significantly.

I told her the trouble I'd had tracking her employer down.

She didn't seem surprised. "Look, it's almost six," she said. "Would you care to wait in the Avvocato's private office? He ought to be here any moment now. Too bad you couldn't hear him today in Mantua. A big counterfeiting case. It must have been quite a spectacle. When the Avvocato pleads in court, a lot of people go there just to listen to him."

The private office made me think of the back room of an antique shop that hasn't been aired or dusted for years. There were many pieces of old furniture, none of them belonging to the same style or period. A grandfather's clock, no longer running, stood in one corner, its hands pointing to six o'clock. Chairs and chests and *credenzas* cluttered the room, and there was also a large desk, covered with inkpots, paper cutters, paperweights, books, unopened letters, sheets of music, ashtrays, broken-off pencils, and an old-fashioned telephone.

Next to the desk was a wooden filing cabinet, reaching all the way up to the ceiling. On the wall behind the desk was a diploma,

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with two red seals, stating that Mario Stradivari had been graduated "*juris utriusque doctor*" from Padua University, and next to it hung a similar document, with one red seal, stating that a retriever by the name of Kerry, whose photograph was attached, had been awarded the first prize last year at the Codogno Dog Show.

"Kerry's a wonderful dog," said the girl as I was examining this. "The Avvocato is crazy about Kerry. He's a great sportsman, you know."

I nodded, without much enthusiasm. Somehow I felt let down. I suppose I had more or less expected something different—a couple of Strads in a glass case, perhaps, and pictures and framed letters of old Antonio Stradivari on the walls. I asked the girl whether she knew anything about how her employer was related to Antonio Stradivari.

"Oh, the Avvocato must be his great grandchild or something," she said vaguely. "I don't know."

A telephone rang in the outer office, and the girl went to answer it. She came back a few minutes later, wearing a top coat.

"Almost six," she said. "Time for me to leave." She hesitated and added, "Would you mind very much if I asked you to wait for the Avvocato out in front of the house? He really won't be long. And, not having met you, he might think . . ."

I said I wouldn't mind at all, and asked her to describe the Avvocato, so I wouldn't miss him.

She laughed again. "You can't miss him," she said. "No one ever does." We went out, and she closed the door, bade me good night, and was gone.

It was dark, and fog had begun to thicken in the street. From a lighted window across the way came the melody of "*La donna è mobile*", being played over the radio by a brass band. The bell of the cathedral struck six, and then other bells began to sound, to my left and right and, seemingly, everywhere.

I stood there quite a while, alone in the fog-shrouded street, listening to the bells, and then the figure of a man moved startlingly into the beam of light that shone from the window. He was big and tall, and it struck me instantly that he might have been part of a Michelangelo sculpture. He had a furrowed Renaissance face, a large, aquiline nose, and a high forehead, and he walked bent slightly forward, with long, swaying steps. He was wearing a drooping, unbuttoned overcoat and a hat with a very broad brim, and was clutching a brief case with a broken handle.

"*Au revoir, au revoir!*" he shouted at me in a sonorous bass-baritone, taking off his hat with magnificent grandezza. "Sorry," he went on. "I'm always getting mixed up when I talk French.

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But *bienvenu, bienvenu*! I met Maddalena in the piazza and she told me about you. That silly girl should have let you wait in my office. Come in and be welcome in the house of Stradivari!"

He led the way in, past the entrance to the outer office, and opened an inner door, which was built into the wall so inconspicuously that I wouldn't have noticed it in passing.

"Careful," he said as he went in first. "This is narrow."

I squeezed in after him and discovered that we had entered his private office through a secret door concealed by the tall wooden filing cabinet.

"A useful invention," Stradivari said, throwing his hat and brief case on his desk and pointing to the cabinet. "Sometimes the *carabinieri* are after a client who happens to be sitting here in my office. By the time the girl has announced them, my client is out and gone. Also to be recommended when you handle the divorce case of a woman with a jealous husband and a couple of lovers. Sit down, sit down."

He slumped into a chair behind the desk. "That damn judge in Mantua! Keeps me there all day long and in the end sends my clients to gaol for three years because he thinks they've counterfeited some trifling thousand-lire banknotes. Of course they've done it, but what's the difference? A few inflated bills more or less, hardly worth the paper they're counterfeited on. The paper we use today as currency has very little in common with money. Well, what can I do for you, my friend? A criminal affair! Most people know me as a criminal lawyer. Or have you been having trouble with the questura? They've been making it difficult for foreigners to have their visas extended—God knows why."

I explained, with some hesitation, the purely sentimental nature of my visit. At this, Stradivari stared at me in amazement. Then he got up and pressed my hands with great warmth.

"Damn Maddalena! Why didn't she tell me you weren't a client? I don't like to see clients after six at night. That's why the hands of my clock here always point to six—a reminder that that is the end of a day's work. But it isn't often that an admirer of Antonio Stradivari comes to see me. Before the war, yes, a few, but nowadays no one seems to care. People are too busy thinking up new ways of blasting one another into oblivion. Who's got time for violins? It was lucky for old Antonio that he lived three hundred odd years ago. Today, he would have trouble making his instruments. He would need hard wood from what is now Yugoslavia, and he wouldn't be able to get the right ingredients for his varnish, and on top of that the government would tax him to death."

Stradivari opened a big drawer, rummaged among various pieces of bric-à-brac and came up with a small bronze statue of a

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man sitting on a chair holding a violin in his hands. At its base was the inscription "ANTONIO STRADIVARI."

"There he is," said Mario Stradivari, giving the back of the statue a friendly pat. "People say that I've inherited the big nose, the high-domed forehead, the curved mouth, and the long fingers. Ridiculous!"

Then he drew out of the drawer a coloured photograph of the retriever whose picture I had already noticed on the wall.

"I wish you could see Kerry," he said. "He's fine on points, and he's got the best nose in the whole province. Sometimes he actually understands what you're talking about. Kerry lives at a little place that I have at Pizzighettone, thirty kilometres from here. My friends call it the Castle, but it's as run down as an old adventuress. Well, my castle doesn't matter, but I'll be damned if I'll let anything happen to Kerry. You agree with me, don't you? You are familiar with shooting?"

When I replied that all I had shot at in peacetime were some small figures of swans and undressed ladies in a shooting gallery at Ocean Park, California, Stradivari looked pained.

"Well, you don't know what you're missing," he said. "My father used to say that shooting was the greatest thrill in life, and Papa knew a lot of things."

He got up and showed me the framed oval picture of a dignified elderly man, who plainly had the amused eyes and the knowing smile of my host.

"That's Papa," he said. "Papa's name was Libero, and he was the best lawyer in Cremona. Had his office in this very room. Papa was a great orator. They called him 'the siren of the Cremonese forum,' on account of his voice, which sounded like an angry foghorn. Papa was a member of the City Council, and when he made a speech at the Palazzo del Comune, the newspaper reporters didn't bother to go upstairs to hear him. They'd just make sure the windows of the council chamber were open, and then they'd cover the speech from the café downstairs, taking his words down in shorthand between swallows of wine.

"Papa played the flute very well. Sometimes he was asked to play first flute at the opera house when they gave a première. Papa was always a fierce believer in independence, too. He was a follower of Garibaldi and gave his second daughter, my younger sister, the name of Anita, because that was the name of Garibaldi's wife."

Stradivari produced another photograph, which showed his father in his younger years, with three dapper gentlemen companions. I judged from the clothes the four were wearing that the picture had been taken around the beginning of the century.

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A handwritten dedication on the picture read, 'To my always great friend Libero Stradivari from Giacomo Puccini.'

"Papa and Puccini were great friends," said Mario Stradivari. "Those two other fellows are Giacosa and Illica, Puccini's librettists. They and Sardou wrote *Tosca* together. And other operas. You will notice that Illica has turned one side of his face to the camera. That is because he didn't have an ear on the other side. He lost it in a duel. He was a formidable fellow, that Illica, always duelling. I think he had thirty two duels in his life, which is something, even for the author of *Tosca*. He and Giacosa and Puccini would come here for a few days, to drink and play music and sing with Papa, and they would march through Cremona all night long, making so much noise that they woke everybody up.

"One night, they were singing the Christmas song from the second act of *Bohème*. A policeman came up to them on the Piazza del Comune and told them to be quiet. Papa pointed at Puccini and asked the policeman what had become of the old, music-loving town of Cremona where a man couldn't even sing his own melodies any more. The policeman knew all about opera, of course, like every policeman in Italy, and got very indignant and said, 'What do you mean, his song? That was from *Bohème*. Next thing, you'll tell me that he is Maestro Puccini!'

"At that, Puccini took off his hat, saluted with his cane, and said, 'I am Puccini.' The policeman got so mad at what he considered an impertinent impersonation that he arrested all four of them, and they had to spend the night in gaol, where they kept everybody awake singing opera."

He sighed. "In those days, people spent time and ingenuity to have fun," he said. "Come, now, let's go to my apartment upstairs and have a glass of wine. A friend is coming to see me later. He can tell you all about Antonio Stradivari. Knows much more about the Old Man than I do."

The stairway was dark, and Stradivari, after groping in vain for the light switch, put two fingers in his mouth and produced a shrill whistle. A few moments later, the light was turned on from upstairs, and a woman appeared on the landing, shouting, "That you, Avvocato?"

Stradivari shouted back, "Si, bellissima."

The woman said, "And who's with you?" and he yelled, "A friend, bellissima."

We walked up to the first landing, where the bellissima was standing, a shrivelled little lady in her late nineties. Stradivari hugged her fondly and introduced her to me as the janitress.

"She's been in this house for sixty two years," he said.

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"Naturally, you can't expect her to run up and down now, so we've installed her up here and she handles the lights and visitors by remote control."

His housekeeper, a plain-faced peasant woman wearing a white apron, bade us good evening, and Stradivari told her to bring us some food and drink.

The woman looked crestfallen and said the Avvocato had twice assured her that he would not be home for dinner. Stradivari set up a frightful fuss at this, and the woman fled, making the sign of the cross and mumbling that she would try to scrape up some cheese and wine. The hallway of the apartment had a stone floor and was cold, but the living-room, a large one, was warm and friendly. The portrait of a woman, painted in the manner of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, dominated one wall.

"My grandmother, Maini Lavinia," Stradivari said, pointing to it. "She must have been a beautiful woman. We Stradivaris always marry beautiful women."

He sat down at a big piano by a window. Scattered all over the piano, as well as under, behind, and around it, were the scores of operas, operettas, and popular music, together with sheets of notepaper, some blank and some covered with pencilled musical notations. On the wall by the piano was a signed photograph of Verdi. On the other side of the room hung two pictures, both of them, apparently, of Rossini. Stradivari said that only one of the two was actually of Rossini, and asked me to guess which it was.

I made a guess, and he laughed and said I was wrong, like everybody else.

"Here, let me show you who the other one is," he said. He took a small comb out of his pocket, combed his hair forward until it nearly reached his eyes, made a big bow out of his tie, turned up his collar, struck a pose, and looked like the image of the composer of *The Barber of Seville*.

Stradivari enjoyed his little joke. "I've fooled a lot of musicians that way," he said. "It's just a little way I have of keeping up the tradition of the great name of Antonio Stradivari, which for centuries has also been fooling people. People who think they own genuine Strads. No month goes by without somebody writing me to say they've found an old violin in their attic with a label in it saying, '*Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis Faciebat*,' followed by the year. They think they've got a great treasure there and want my expert judgment. I don't know a damn thing about violins, but, of course, I know that there are only some five hundred Stradivarius violins on earth, most of them listed in catalogues and tested by juries, and the chances that anybody's

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going to find a real Strad in his attic are about one in a million now. Good old Antonio! He really started something."

There was a knock on the door, and a small, intense-looking man with horn-rimmed glasses and a harassed manner came in. He was carrying a heavy brief case and was breathless from lugging it up the stairs. Stradivari greeted him exuberantly and introduced him as his friend Renzio Bacchetta, a professor at the Scuola Internazionale di Liuteria, Cremona's school for violin-making, who was also a prominent journalist and the town's outstanding expert on Antonio Stradivari.

Bacchetta took a gloomy view of the latter distinction.

"Don't think this makes me popular with the people in Cremona," he said. "They don't know the first thing about Stradivari, and they care less. All they care about is that the price of cheese should stay up. If Antonio Stradivari had invented a new kind of cheese, instead of making great instruments, they would have built him a monument. As it is . . ."

His voice trailed off in despair. Stradivari shook him by the shoulders. "No weeping tonight, Bacchetta!" he shouted. "My friend has come all the way from America to hear a few juicy family scandals of the Stradivaris."

The little man nodded bitterly. "Did you tell him the *real* scandal?" he asked. "That this town doesn't own a single violin made by Stradivari, or the Amatis, or the Guarneris—not one great Cremonese instrument? Yes, Signor," he said, turning dramatically to me. "Cremona has betrayed its great heritage. The cheese-makers, silk manufacturers, and inn-keepers shy away from Mario Stradivari. Their conscience bothers them. They say that they can't afford to raise a few million lire to build Antonio Stradivari a monument. They gave his name to a street, as if he'd been a former member of the City Council, but they wouldn't buy back one of the Master's violins. If a Cremonese wants to look at a Strad, he has to travel to Paris, Amsterdam, or New York."

His voice broke and he sank down dejectedly into a deep chair.

Mario laughed and said, "Poor Bacchetta. He can't get over it. Back in 1937, they had an exhibition of Stradivari violins here to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of Antonio's death. There were some fifty Strads—"

"Forty one," Bacchetta corrected him. "The first of them built by Antonio when he was nineteen years old and still under the influence of his great teacher, Nicolò Amati, and the last made when he was an old, old man and the greatest master of them all."

"Well," said Mario, his eyes twinkling, "I went to see the exhibition and wanted to take one of the violins into my hands

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to have a good look at it, and a man in striped trousers came staring down his nose at me and said the public was not permitted to touch the instruments. Would I please leave ? he asked, or he would have to call the police."

Bacchetta turned on him severely. "That's not funny, Avvocato," he said. "Here you are, the descendant of the great *liutaio*, and not only don't own one of his instruments but not even a paper or letter signed by his hand, or one of his tools, a piece of the wood he worked with, a relic—anything. Maybe that unhappy year of your birth has something to do with it."

"What's my birth year got to do with it ? " Stradivari asked.

"You were born in 1883, the same year in which the Cremonese school came to an end, with the death of Enrico Ceruti, the last of the great masters," said Bacchetta. A new wave of melancholy seemed to sweep over him. To forestall another emotional outburst, I asked how long the family of Stradivari had lived in Cremona.

"Oh, quite some time," said Mario casually. "I think the first mention is around 1300 or so."

He started to search about the floor, kicking aside scores of Wagner, Verdi, and Bizet until he found a dusty leather-bound volume that contained a detailed genealogical chart.

"I remember Grandfather," said Mario. "He was one of the best doctors in town, but he refused to treat the rich burghers, and, instead, practised among the peasants and workers, who couldn't pay him. He could afford such whims."

"Antonio Stradivari was your great-great-great-great-grandfather," said Bacchetta without so much as glancing at the chart. "You, Avvocato," he continued with immense pathos, "are therefore the sixth-generation descendant."

Mario threw the book on the floor, sat down at the piano, and began to play the triumphal march from *Aïda*.

The housekeeper came in with a tray on which she had arranged three glasses and plates, half a dozen bottles of wine, and some big pieces of gorgonzola.

Bacchetta gulped bitterly. "Cheese again," he said. "Wherever I go, I hear and see cheese. Even in the house of Stradivari."

Stradivari filled the glasses with an orange-coloured liquid.

"Try this," he said to us. "It's made from my own oranges down at my castle. Very strong. Cheer up, Bacchetta. Things could be much worse. After all, there *is* a genuine Stradivari in this house."

He pointed to himself, and we raised our glasses. A couple of hours and three bottles later, he went back to the piano and fished out some sheet music from the heap on the floor. It was

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the score of an opera called *Le Nozze in Turenna*, music by Mario Stradivari.

"Mario is known," Baccheta told me, "and appreciated as a part-time composer all over Italy, except in his home town. He has written two operas and a number of lesser works, and quite a few popular songs that are frequently heard on the radio in Italy."

"The libretto," said Mario, "is taken from a story by Balzac. An old man marries a beautiful young woman and is sort of nervous at the thought of his wedding night, so he sends a young man into the grotto instead. A typical Balzac story. Let me sing you the love duet in the grotto."

He played the introduction and began to sing. His voice, though never trained professionally, showed the typically Italian flair for good singing; his pitch and rhythm were perfect. The love duet ended on a beautiful melodic line that reminded me of Puccini, and Stradivari gave it a lot of rubato. As he started to play it over again, somebody pounded on the wall. Bacchetta told me that it was the director of the local museum, who lived next door, a fellow not distinguished by enthusiasm for music.

"The museum has three big halls filled with mediæval coins," said Bacchetta angrily, "but there's only one small room for the souvenirs of Stradivari and the other violin-makers. Why, the museum people didn't even want to lend me the diaries of Cozio di Salabue, which I have edited."

I made the mistake of asking about Cozio di Salabue. Bacchetta became very excited at this, opened his brief case, and produced a fat manuscript, which he stuck into my hands.

"Two thousand pages," he said. "It took me nine months, sixteen hours a day, two magnifying glasses, and three secretaries to edit those diaries. Quite a few important people have tried to prevent me from publishing them, since they contain some of the most sensational stuff yet about Antonio Stradivari."

As an expert, Bacchetta ran true to form. He opened his brief case again and showed me a copy of a booklet he had written called *Stradivari Was* Not *Born in* 1644, which, he said, was going to give a lot of people sleepless nights. Bacchetta's convictions are based on the diaries of Count Alessandro Cozio di Salabue, a Piedmontese nobleman who lived in Casale Monferrato at the beginning of the nineteenth century and assembled a great collection of Stradivari memoriale—instruments, letters, papers, designs, formulas for making varnish, tools. He bought them all from Antonio Stradivari's youngest son. Almost every accredited Strad has a pedigree in which are entered, with presumed accuracy, the names of all its previous owners and the years of their ownership.

Mario had stopped playing, but now he was plainly growing

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tired of listening to Bacchetta, and he resumed singing some selections from *Traviata*. The thumping on the wall recommenced, and Bacchetta raised his voice to be heard above the din.

"In his last years, Stradivari would sometimes write his age on the label of a violin he had just made," he said. "One famous Strad is inscribed, '*Stradivarius Faciebat Anno* 1736 *D'Anni* 92.'"

Mario's singing grew louder, and the pounding on the wall became more furious. Bacchetta was obliged to shout for all he was worth. "This would set the year of Stradivari's birth as 1644," he announced. "But suppose that was one of the violins in which Cozio di Salabue changed the date!"

A bell clanged, and the housekeeper came in to yell something at Stradivari, who was now singing Wagner and paid no attention to her. She went out and, a minute later, returned with word that the neighbours would call the police if the noise didn't stop.

Stradivari told her to get out, but he let up on the piano and suggested that we go round to the opera house.

"It's past eleven," said Bacchetta. "The place will be closed."

Stradivari said that suited him fine; at least we'd have privacy there. He pocketed a bottle of wine and handed one to me and to Bacchetta, who cautiously put his manuscript back into his brief case, with the air of a man bearing the responsibility of carrying an atomic secret in his pocket.

As we started down the street, Stradivari began to roar the "Toreador" song from *Carmen*, his voice reverberating against the stone walls of the stairway. "Go ahead, friends, sing!" he paused to shout. "One always sings in the house of Stradivari!"

Outside, it was still foggy and quiet. The cold air seemed to have a calming effect on Stradivari. He stopped singing, and as we walked, we chatted about the mixed reactions of his fellow-countrymen to his famous name. Once in a while, he said, it was of some help to him.

When we arrived in front of the opera house, it was dark and deserted. We walked round to the stage door, where Stradivari bore down on a push button and began to bellow.

Presently, the janitor, a dilapidated patriarch, appeared, wearing a stained house gown over an odd assortment of underwear. He started to curse us and our ancestors, but his face brightened when he recognized Stradivari. They clapped each other on the shoulder as we filed in. Switching on lights as he shuffled ahead, the janitor led us first to his office for a glass of wine, and then to the stage.

The curtain was up, and the stage was set for the fourth act of *Rigoletto*, which had been given the night before. The peculiar back-stage smell of dust and fresh paint permeated the place.

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Stradivari stepped in front of the footlights, his eyes sweeping over the vast, dark auditorium, and began to sing. He sang everybody's arias—the Duke's, Rigoletto's, and Monterone's—and then he said he was thirsty, and the janitor went to fetch glasses.

By the time we had finished the third bottle, Stradivari, the old janitor, Bacchetta, and I were singing the beautiful quartet from the fourth act of the opera, with Bacchetta and myself taking the women's parts. After each number, the janitor would switch on the house lights, Bacchetta would let down the curtain, and then the four of us would step in front of the footlights, bowing proudly to the applause of an enthusiastic, if invisible, audience.

Stradivari, Bacchetta and I left the opera house at two in the morning.

"Now is the right time to pay a formal visit to the home of Antonio Stradivari," said Mario, leading the way to the Piazza Roma, a well-lighted square in the centre of town. On one side of it was a small park, and, on the other, the marble façade of one of those big, neo-classic, palace-like office buildings, with marble façades and impressive entrances, that were built all over Italy during Mussolini's régime to provide work for the unemployed.

Stradivari stopped and pointed up to a small marble panel just above one of the windows. "*Ecco*!" he said. "That's all there is to remind the people of Cremona that Antonio's house once stood here. The government tore it down in 1928, because they wanted the site for this building. My brother and I tried to keep them from doing it. You can see that we failed."

Bacchetta put down his brief case and sighed deeply.

"Just imagine," he said. "There in front of us once stood the workshop of Antonio Stradivari. It was a simple two-storey building. Twenty years ago, I remember, it had a tailor's shop and a billiard saloon on the ground floor. It was probably there that Antonio made most of his instruments.

We turned and walked across the park, in which there were the usual play areas for children, benches, and gravel-covered paths. At an inconspicuous spot near the far side of the park, Mario stopped and pointed out a three-foot-high block of stone.

On the lower part of the stone, almost where it touched the ground, I read the name STRADIVARI.

Mario took off his hat. "Signor," he said to me solemnly, though his eyes were smiling, "you happen to be standing in front of all that is left of Antonio Stradivari's grave. Well, Bacchetta," he added, "tell us what happened."

Bacchetta seemed overcome with sorrow. He stood there staring at the stone, and when he spoke it was in a whisper.

"It really isn't much of a story," he said simply. "But it is

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the saddest page in the history of Cremona. No one knows exactly *what* happened. They say today that the land was needed for a public playground, but the truth is that back in 1868 a wrecker from Milan paid the city fathers of Cremona forty two thousand lire for the privilege of demolishing the Church of San Domenico, which used to stand over there by the square. He carted the materials away and sold them. The family grave of Antonio Stradivari was right there, on this spot, in the so-called Rosario Chapel of the church. He died on December 18, 1737—*that* date is certain—and was buried the following day, and later most of his children were buried near him. In the course of the demolition of the church, the grave was opened and the bones were taken out. What happened to them? Maybe the workers took them to the local cemetery and threw them into a common grave. Or maybe they got tired and just walked to the bank of the Po, for it is only a few minutes away, and threw the bones into the river. Whatever happened, it is the final, cruel irony of the fate of a man of whom we know almost nothing and who has given us so much."

Two *carabinieri*, making their round of the Piazza Roma, stopped to scrutinize the three of us with a curious and suspicious air.

"I bet you my manuscript of Cozio's diaries that they don't know what this stone here stands for," said Bacchetta, glowering at the police. "Few people do."

Mario Stradivari began to hum a melody. "I've written the lyrics and tune of a song called *Addio Me Vechia Cremona*," he said. He began to sing, strumming an imaginary guitar. "It's written in Cremonese dialect," he explained after finishing an incomprehensible verse. "It goes like this: 'They say the old Stradivari comes at night into the park to look at his monument. But, alas! all he finds is two mongrels who use the block of stone for their needs.'"

He broke into laughter, and started to repeat the refrain. Bacchetta joined him, singing loudly and defiantly and staring straight at the *carabinieri*, who were now watching us from just about where Antonio Stradivari had had his workshop. Mario Stradivari and Bacchetta kept right on singing, their voices powerful and derisive, until the two police walked away and vanished among the old houses of Cremona.

* * *

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

Never lend books—no one ever returns them. The only books I have in my library are those which people have lent me.

ANATOLE FRANCE, 1844-1924

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WITCHING-TIME

When Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head ?
How begot, how nourished ?
Reply, reply.

It is engender'd in the eyes,
With gazing fed ; and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.
Let us all ring fancy's knell :
I'll begin it,—Ding, dong, bell.
Ding, dong, bell.

—and Love at First Sight

. . . Your brother and my sister no sooner met, but they looked ; no sooner looked but they loved ; no sooner loved but they sighed ; no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason ; no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy : and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage. They are in the very wrath of love, and they will together : clubs cannot part them.

As You Like It

Gentle Lover

Come, gentle night ; come, loving, black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo : and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.
O ! I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it, and, though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd.

Romeo and Juliet

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—*and Soldier Lover*

A good leg will fall, a straight back will stoop, a black beard will turn white, a curled pate will grow bald, a fair face will wither, a full eye will wax hollow, but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon ; or, rather, the sun, and not the moon ; for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly. If thou would have such a one, take me ; and take me, take a soldier ; take a soldier, take a king. And what sayest thou then to my love ? speak, my fair, and fairly, I pray thee.

Henry the Fifth

Love's Music

The moon shines bright : in such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise, in such a night
Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night . . .

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank !
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears : soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica : look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold :
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins . . .

The Merchant of Venice

—*and a Fool's Paradise*

May I be so converted, and see with these eyes ? I cannot tell ; I think not . . . One woman is fair, yet I am well ; another is wise, yet I am well ; another virtuous, yet I am well ; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain ; wise, or I'll none ; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her ; fair, or I'll never look on her ; mild, or come not near me . . . of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what colour it please God . . .

Much Ado About Nothing

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IDYLL OF THE SAHARA

"It is the horned one," she said, "who plays upon the pipe"

by LORD DUNSANY

I HAD arrived late at the Club. I had been to a Committee meeting of the *Society for the Reduction of Chimney Pots*, for I had suddenly got roped in to the S.R.C.P. by merely agreeing with a man I met one day that there were far too many chimney pots in London. I had only agreed out of politeness, never giving the thing a thought, but then that's how one gets caught sometimes, and a guinea a year for life. Well, the dullness of it had given me a sudden need for something a little stranger, and I had thought of Jorkens and gone straight to the Club.

Lunch was over, and nine or ten of them were gathered before that fireplace we have, and Jorkens was there among them; and as no one was saying anything at the moment, I ventured a remark about travel in far lands. But something that Jorkens had had with his lunch had tended to make him drowsy, and I drew from him no response. A direct question from Terbut, however, aroused him, when he was asked, "What used you to travel for, Jorkens?"

"Oh, one thing and another," said Jorkens. "Chiefly that. But not always, you know."

I think Terbut recognized that he had got no further. Indeed, in spite of the tales with which he has often passed the time for us, when it might otherwise have hung heavy, there remains a certain mystery about the motive of Jorkens' activities, which none of us at the Club has yet entirely cleared up.

One more effort I made to rouse him. "You were telling us the other day about the most beautiful music you ever heard," I said.

For, surprisingly, he had recently been lured to talk about music, and might, I thought, do so again. And my effort succeeded.

"I didn't say it was the most beautiful music I ever heard," said Jorkens. "The most beautiful music I ever heard was a long way away from there, where I heard that tune of which I was telling you, a long way away from London."

"Where was it?" asked Terbut.

"Beyond your travelling, Terbut," said Jorkens. "Altogether beyond it."

And yet it wasn't so far really. It turned out that it was only a

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few hundred miles south of the Mediterranean where it comes nearest to Europe. So I think that Jorkens must have been referring more to Terbut's experience of life than to ground that he may have covered, which I think was never any great distance from London.

"It was like this," he went on. "I was camped at the foot of a little range called the Ouled Naïl Mountains, hunting Barbary sheep, great brown bearded creatures with magnificent heads. I used to hunt in those mountains all day, and at evening I would come back to my little camp and look at the sunset. And that alone was worth going all the way from London to see. That's what I was doing.

"I only had three Arabs in my camp; one to look after the camels, one to cook, and one to do odd jobs for the other two. And then one day, far up the slope of a mountain, looking through glasses, I saw another caravan crawl over the desert below me, camels loaded with baggage, that looked in that vast immensity like a line of snails going over a gravel path. But what caught my attention and kept my glasses fixed on that caravan for the rest of the afternoon, instead of thinking of Barbary sheep, was that there were girls in the caravan.

"As a general rule I may say that, if you are after heads, it is best to give your whole mind to it, and to keep away from girls altogether. And I dare say that applies to everything else. I should say that very likely it does. But, at the time of life at which I was then, I did not give so much attention to general rules as one is able to do looking back on it, and, to tell you the truth, I entirely forgot about the heads I was after and only thought of the girls. This was, of course, a great mistake, because I might have had some very fine heads to show if I'd stuck to the business in hand, whereas all I got out of the other business was, well, you shall hear.

"They were young and, as far as I could tell through my glasses, pretty. But at any rate they were girls, and after a few months in those very lonely mountains, that meant more than it would here, where one might quite possibly pass four girls without very much noticing them. I don't say one would, but it's possible.

"There were four of them sitting, two on a camel, on top of bundles. What particularly pleased me was that the caravan was slanting towards the mountains, which meant that they would camp soon, because there was no way over those mountains with camels except by one pass, which was too far on ahead of them. Well, I watched those girls laughing on their camels until they were out of sight round a spur of the mountains. And it did me good to see them. When I got back to my little lonely camp and the sun had set I had to do some hard thinking. What I had to think about was how to get in touch with those girls. Once I could do that, I felt sure of getting on with them. I was a lot younger then, you see, and it came easily to me. What wasn't so easy was getting near their tents at all, or

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anywhere where there are girls about. The Arabs are rather touchy about that. So I had to think hard.

"I knew they'd camp within a few miles, and sure enough they did. And a few miles are nothing in the Sahara when one is young. But how could I walk over and call on the girls, without being shot by Arabs or eaten by dogs? Every Arab carries some sort of gun in the desert, and every camp has enough dogs to guard it by day or by night. The dogs I felt I could manage. But what about the men? For the dogs I had enough in my little store of drugs that I always take with me when I am anything much over a hundred miles from a chemist's shop. And for the men I had an even more potent charm, which is gold; but it took some thinking, as I sat outside my tent in the starlight, to work out how to apply it."

"Did you take much gold about with you," asked Terbut, "when you went travelling?"

"Not much," said Jorkens. "Two nuggets as a matter of fact, two nuggets that I wore on my watch-chain. I wore them in memory of an experience at the other end of that continent, when a firm sent me out from the City to sell a gold mine. They were perfectly genuine nuggets, though they didn't happen to have been bred, if that is the right word, in that particular mine, which somehow or other the fellow with whom I was trying to do business found out. So nothing came of the deal, and I kept the two nuggets. Just as a memento, you know. Well, there they were on my watch-chain. That's all the gold I had about me, Terbut, unless you count the watch-chain; and I don't remember now what that was made of."

"And did you buy the girls?" asked Terbut.

"No," said Jorkens. "No. They would have cost more than I happened to have on me at the time. I did not use those two nuggets for purchase: I used them for bait. And the scheme I worked out was this, a very simple one, but I like a simple scheme. The complicated ones may be good too; but with so many complications, one of them may not work. And then where is your scheme? No, I prefer them simple.

"Well, this was what I worked out: when I found where they were camped I would move along the mountains to somewhere above them, and there start digging. We had a sort of spade in our camp, to make things smooth for my tent. I should dig, and all the men in their camp would come out to look. And that is exactly what happened.

"I was up, as I always was, just before dawn, when the Barbary sheep are feeding on the tulips. A long thin column of smoke went up straight as the leg of a table, with a tablecloth on the top of it, and I knew that in the mouth of a little valley that ran out of the mountains the Arabs must be encamped. I went a little further till

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I came to the crest of a ridge, and there they were on the flat under the mountain, sheltered by one of its precipices, asleep in their camels'-hair tents, while the girls lit fires outside and were boiling kettles. Their camels were lying down, and seemed still asleep. I took my glasses out, and the girls seemed as young as ever.

"No one had seen me yet, as far as I was able to tell; but you never quite know in those lonely mountains. I went quietly back to my tent for breakfast, and then set out with my spade."

"What did you have for breakfast?" asked Terbut, probably hoping to catch Jorkens out over some trivial detail.

"I don't quite remember now," said Jorkens. "But imagine the most perfect spread you can get anywhere in London, perfectly cooked and pleasantly served in a large airy room, and in perfect comfort. That is the kind of impression I have of breakfast in the desert. No liveried waiters, but I think the sun coming up over the Sahara was more gorgeous than any liveries, and as for food, all food seems splendid there.

"Well, I got my spade and told my three Arabs that I was going digging, and left it to their imaginations to find out what I was digging for. Then I went as near to the other camp as one goes to camps in the desert; the Arabs don't like strangers to come too close.

"A little way up the mountain above them I began to dig. I threw out a spadeful behind me, and quietly put down one of my nuggets right in the middle of it. In the sunlight that sweeps over the Sahara, turning it blue as the sea, it was not likely that a nugget of gold would be missed, but I threw down a cigarette near it, and knew that the Arabs would never miss that.

"Well they soon strolled out of their encampment to look at me, and gave me the greeting that the stronger always gives to the weaker, the stronger being quite rightly determined by numbers. '*Assalamo aleikom*,' one of them said to me, and I replied '*Aleikom assalam*.'

"Then they asked me why I was digging. And I said, 'For the sake of exercise.' This might make some faint sense in England, where there are one or two people who have been known to do such a thing. But throughout that half of the world that we vaguely know as the East my remark was sheer nonsense, as I meant it to be, for I was leaving it to them to make sense of what I was doing. I knew that they would think that I was either digging for gold or diamonds or rubies, or looking for a spell that would supply some of these, and to give them some further assistance in that direction I threw out my other nugget in a light spadeful of sand.

"'May you find what you seek,' said another of them, a tall man like a king of Assyria coming down like a wolf on the fold.

"He found the cigarette, but none of them touched the gold. There were only five of them there, one of them being a kind of

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slave, who hung about a little way off. They were men of the Ouled Naïl, leaving their mountains and going to one of the towns to the North, in which they would trade for a few weeks before going home. They did not tell me in what trade they meant to engage.

" I offered them cigarettes, and then went on with my digging. ' I take exercise,' I repeated, ' and hope to find health from it.'

" ' *Inshaallah*,' they said, and drifted back to their camp.

" I went on with my digging for hours, not that there was much soil to dig : it was mostly rock : bright brown rock by day, and at sunset the colour of roses. Then I carefully covered in the hole I had dug and went back to my camp.

" The men of the Ouled Naïl stayed in their camp all through the afternoon, probably assuming that, even if I did not keep an eye on my diggings, there is always someone watching in those mountains. But I knew they would go as soon as it got dusk. And they must all have done so, even the slave, who would not have been allowed to dig, but who evidently could not keep away from the neighbourhood of great treasure."

" What did they think was there ? " asked Terbut.

" I don't exactly know," said Jorkens. " But it is quite easy to guess. You only have to read *The Arabian Nights*. It was the favourite reading of any that I had talked to among those who were able to read, and they would naturally suppose that anyone looking for treasure would be looking for the kind of treasure that you read of there ; bowls of rubies, diamonds in coffers of gold and various things like that. Anyway they went, whatever they may have been after, because when I went in the dusk to their camp the men weren't there ; only the women.

" Of course the dogs made too much noise, but I threw them lumps of meat, with a sedative in the meat. They stopped barking before they had done more of it than they would do for a passing jackal, and apparently it did not attract undue attention from the men who had gone to the mountain. I walked away while the dogs were eating the meat, and returned when they had gone to sleep.

" I picked out the loveliest of the girls at once, and walked straight up to her. I had to be quick, not knowing how much time there might be to spare, and luckily she had none of that coyness, or any tiresome formalities that might have wasted valuable time and delayed our getting to know each other. Stars above us, and the glint of her eyes below : it was a lovely scene. Those stars were like nothing you ever see here, nor those eyes either. Looking at the stars one got an idea of the magnitude of distances hitherto beyond one's dreams, and her eyes, like the eyes of all Arabs, seemed focused to the distances of the desert. But they seemed brighter than the eyes of any other Arab that I had known, and they shone

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there under the pale-blue stars. We got on quite well at once."

"What did you talk about?" asked Terbut.

"The weather and crops," said Jorkens.

"What crops are there in the Sahara?" asked Terbut.

"Sand," replied Jorkens.

And at that Terbut gave up, and interrupted no more.

"Yes, we talked about the crops, and other things. Other things too, Terbut. And, as I was saying, we got on very well. She told me they were travelling along the edge of the desert under the mountains to the cities, where the four girls were going to be sold. They were quite nice girls, but they didn't mind being sold in the cities as much as you might suppose. In fact they didn't really seem to mind at all. But you mustn't judge them by our standards.

"In those bare mountains they had such an idea of cities as the best among us have of Paradise, so that to be sold in a city, as their aunts had been before them, was not what it would be to nice girls here, and I am afriad that they were rather looking forward to it. Well, I set myself to persuade that charming girl to have her fling before she got to the cities. But I had to be quick. Luckily she wasted no time.

"She really was lovely; so lovely that I hardly noticed at first that the other three girls seemed quite prepared to get on with me as well as Morning Glory was doing, to give an English rendering of the rather unpronounceable name for some blue flower that I took to be Morning Glory. There they were, all four of them in the firelight, three of them looking as lovely as one another, and one of them lovelier than the flower after which she was named. Round us were the camels'-hair tents and the sleeping camels, and the dogs that I had not doped lying watchful but silent, and the others asleep, and the long shadows going out from the campfire, and round everything the enormous spaces of the Sahara, and over us all those stars.

"The thought came to me at that moment that a Mohammedan has four wives. Why shouldn't I be converted, I thought, and marry all four, and spend the rest of my life in a camels'-hair tent in little valleys of the Ouled Naïl mountains, camped under oleanders, called regularly every day by the dawn and breathing air that is like bubbles blown from champagne?

"Well, well, that was my dream. Don't think that I would have contemplated changing my faith for a girl, or giving up one tenet of orthodoxy. I wouldn't have done that for any girl in the world. I am sure of it. But four of them! Four times the temptation one can have ever expected to meet: double I might have resisted. But four times. I think you will hardly blame me.

"And they were all willing to come. I had told my own three Arabs to strike camp as quietly as they could, which meant to pile

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as much of the baggage as possible on our two mules, and even to carry some of it on the shoulders of two men who were to walk part of the way with it, because camels always groan when they are being loaded; and then to wait under the mountains about half a mile beyond the camp of the Ouled Naïls.

"Well, Morning Glory came away with me, and so did the other three. We got away before the men came back. Only one thing we delayed over, and it was worth it. I gave the girls some of my special sedative to give to the four camels, which they did. Just a sleeping-draught that would keep them quiet for the night. That ensured us twelve hours start, but twelve hours mostly dark, when camels could not travel so well, and the pursuit would be on by day.

"Of course I might have poisoned the camels, but that would have started a feud, and a feud in the desert is a long business. They might, indeed, have started one over the loss of the girls, but loss of camels would make it certain; and that feud would have gone on for as long as I was alive, or any of that family of the Ouled Naïl; and they usually have large families.

"We got well away before those men of the Ouled Naïl returned to their camp. In fact I should say we were three miles off when they returned, as we could hear by the barking of their dogs. Sound travels a long way in the desert. When I knew we had that much start, and that the camels of the Ouled Naïl would not wake before dawn, we travelled easily, walking in front of the camels so as to avoid rocks.

"As the girls and I walked over the desert, under Sahara's stars, they chattered to me of the mountains and the flowers that grow in their valleys and the *djinns* that dwelt further up. I let them chatter. After all, don't our most learned men tell tales of gods and goddesses, and of Pan in hills not so unlike those that loomed through the dark on our right? Much of our education comes from Greece, which drew a wisdom out of the very earth, as the Arabs have done from their almost neighbouring soil. They were tales that by day in a town I might scarcely have heeded. But in the night under those mountains they were by no means so easily set aside. For my part I had never entirely disbelieved in Pan: there was a certain plausibility about him, and tales of him that fitted with actual experiences. Might there not be as much to be said for *djinns* that, according to these dear girls, haunted the mountains? And, under those mountains in the night, I had not the mood to reject them. So Morning Glory prattled on as we walked, and the camels walked behind us, reluctantly, for they like to see where they are going.

"Some time long after midnight Morning Glory ceased to talk,

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and looked at me with eyes that shone in the starlight as though she thought it was my turn to give some local report of the doings of *djinns* in clefts of the mountains beside us. So I cast my mind back to things that I had been taught as a boy, and told them a few tales of Pan. I didn't speak Arabic very fluently, and it took some time to make Morning Glory visualize clearly the god or beast I was talking about. But to my astonishment, when I did, she said, 'O yes, a *djinn* like that has sometimes been seen in these mountains.'

"A hairy figure with horns like the one I described, she said, had been seen; and I supposed that they had seen a goat, escaped from the flocks of the nomads in the desert below, or a dark gazelle called an *edmi*, or even a Barbary sheep, and I went on with my story about Pan. But then when I spoke of pipes she said yes, this creature played upon pipes of reed, and had been more often heard than seen. That puzzled me a great deal. It is one thing to tell an incredible story, handed down by the ages, but quite another to have it not only believed, but accepted as local news. That strange acceptance seemed to add a mystery to crags that loomed in the dark.

"We were still walking when dawn came chilly over the desert, and when the sun came up and warmed us. We got up on to the camels then, and moved faster. My three Arabs were merry people and seemed to enjoy our little adventure, but now that it was light they often looked over their shoulders, giving something of an uneasy appearance. But there was no pursuit in sight.

"After a while we rested for half an hour and lit a small fire and drank the black coffee that Arabs boil by putting a little cup on the end of a long handle into the embers; coffee such as I never taste here. We did not pitch any tents, and soon we went on again. There was still no sign of pursuit, but we were not easy on that account. There is often no sign of dawn when you are expecting it. But it comes. And the Ouled Naïl were as certain.

"How long had my imaginary treasure held those five men back, while they lost their real treasure? I calculated that those camels would wake fresh enough in the sunrise, and that we had only gained the bit that we had covered so slowly by night.

"Morning Glory was up on the camel behind me, on a heap of blankets and canvas, and I talked to her as we rode. I told her of a little valley I knew, where the oleanders clustered, lovely pink flowers on bright green bushes that the Arabs call laurier rose, and a stream ran through the valley, or at least a rocky bed in which you could be sure of pools of water, with butterflies floating above them in little clouds. I really told of that valley very poetically. And it was a lovely valley, even if I did exaggerate its beauty a little, and all the lovelier for coming among its flowers, as we did, out of the desert. There we should spend one night. It would be a near thing, but,

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with the Ouled Naïl not yet in sight, we could do it, a night with the stars and her eyes twinkling and shining.

" At dawn we would hurry northwards as fast as we could, away from the Ouled Naïl, and I would become a Mohammedan and marry all four of them. They were all perfectly willing: there was no tiresome bashfulness about them, or any nonsense of that sort, and no apparent jealousy of one another.

" The hours slipped by as I talked to Morning Glory, and I scarcely noticed them going. To our left as far as the horizon, and, as my three Arabs believed, for ever, shone the Sahara, a slaty blue. Close to our right the mountains rose up from it like a hill. We halted at noon to have a meal and a rest.

" We had not rested for half an hour, when one of my Arabs, whose naked eyes could see as well as my field-glasses, saw something on the horizon behind us that he said was the camels of the Ouled Naïl. So their anger was greater than the heat of the day, and it drove them on when all other Arabs and even wild animals are resting for two or three hours. We went on again; and that afternoon we gained on the Ouled Naïl, so that, whether they followed still or changed their minds and rested, none of my three Arabs could see any trace of them where the blue Sahara went into the blue sky.

" The lovely Morning Glory was still seated behind me, as comfortable as we could make her on heaps of rugs and blankets, and I talked to her of her people and of her home, trying to find out if she had any reluctance to leave them. But something I had said of the valley to which we were going had caught her fancy, and that and whatever she fancied she would find in the lands beyond evidently seemed Paradise to her after the bare brown hills of her home. She swore never to leave me, and the girls on the other camels, when they heard her raising her voice to swear, swore by the same oath never to leave me either, which was very nice of them. And I swore by their own oath to live with all four for the length of our days. And don't think that I didn't mean to keep that oath to the letter. Of course it would have meant seeing no more of England, but in that intense sunlight flashing on the Sahara and on the faces of those lovely and friendly girls one somehow forgot the North.

" It was a tiring day. The Arabs wanted to halt towards sunset, and light a fire and have some food and rest, as the men that were after us were not in sight. But I kept on. The sun went down among clouds like golden mountains being wrecked by an earthquake and pouring rubies out of their broken chasms, and it shone on the peaks to the East making them like heaps of jewels hacked by giants from quarries blazing upon enchanted cliffs. Just before night fell, as it

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does rapidly there, we came to the ravine that I knew of in those mountains, and rode up it and found my valley.

"Oh, that valley; it was all that I said of it when I described it to Morning Glory, riding across the desert; a nook, a garden sheltered by the feet of the mountains against every wind, where a stream was running softly under the oleanders. It must have been late summer because the oleanders were all in flower, glowing with some light of their own, for it was long after sunset. But in the desert it always seems summer.

"We halted our camels with that queer guttural noise they obey, a word deep down in the throat which never gets as far as the tongue, so that there are no letters in which it could ever be written; and in the fading light we pitched our tents—my tent and the tent for the girls the Arabs pitched by the stream, and their own discreetly twenty yards off by the rocks at the mouth of the valley. Further than this neither men nor camels separate when they camp in those lands, which are too wild for any traveller to feel safe.

"While the Arabs unloaded the camels and made our camp, Morning Glory prattled on to me of the *djinns* that, as she had been taught from childhood, haunted those ranges, until I felt I knew all the neighbours. One, it seems I did not know. You pick up something of the people and ways of a country as you travel, but one can't know all about it. I don't pretend to. As Morning Glory prattled about the *djinns* I picked oleanders from a branch bending over us, and made a wreath for her hair. She put it on charmingly.

"A young moon was shining over the western edge of our valley, all golden, with horns upwards, like those I have often seen above domes of mosques. I have remembered always, as though it were only yesterday, and shall remember for as many years as are left, Morning Glory sitting with her wreath of oleanders, in her dress of brilliant pink, which would look garish here, but there, where the sun casts colour at every pebble and flower, it was only one of the glories of the desert. And she swore never to leave me.

"Then the three Arabs went away to their own tent. I told them that at dawn, as soon as ever they had said their prayers, they were to strike camp and we would all push on northwards and leave those men of the Ouled Naïl behind.

"Now all the stars were coming out, for our one night in that little valley! Again she swore never to leave me, as though once were not enough. Then from the ridge of the range that rose from our valley, I heard one flute-like note ring through the night. Morning Glory listened at once, and so did I, and there was silence immediately where the other girls had been chattering in their tent. Then more notes followed, blown from a reed pipe. That was the music I was speaking of just now, the most beautiful music I have

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ever heard. It flooded our valley with its unearthly melody.

" Morning Glory never stirred. I looked at her, but she did not look at me. Not a whisper and not a movement came from the tent. They, too, were listening. There have been moments when music has stirred me, but all those moments added together never gripped me as I was gripped by that music then. It did not resemble any tune that we know, but seemed something wilder, something rather more like a symphony made by a master musician out of the blackbirds' chorus at dawn in April, something inhuman from beyond our inspirations.

" ' What is it ? ' I said to Morning Glory. But she did not answer.

" All the valley seemed to be trembling with that tune's ecstatic beauty, and all the oleanders seemed to be quivering with it. The echoes ran softly from rock to rock and filled our valley with music. It consecrated my love for Morning Glory. Again I looked into her face, but her eyes were far from me. I had no idea who was playing, or what he played. If Morning Glory who had lived all her life among those strange mountains did not know what it was, we were indeed at a loss. So I asked her again. Again she sat silent, then brought her gaze back to me, as though from a long way off, and said slowly, ' The horned one.' And at once there returned the far look in her eyes, and she said no more.

" Some frightful suspicion came to me then, and I blurted out, ' Morning Glory, you never would leave me ? ' But she did not answer.

" After that, any more talk became impossible, for the music on the mountain increased in volume, so that I could have scarcely made myself heard. Apart from that, no words seemed able to express any emotion, not even love, when those notes from the pipes of reed were expressing some longing that I could only describe to you in music if I were such a musician as Beethoven.

" She rose to her feet. ' Morning Glory,' I said, ' You would not leave me ! '

" But she made no answer, and turned towards the mountain. At that moment the other three girls stepped out of their tent.

" ' Girls ! Faithless girls of the Ouled Naïl,' I called. But they took no notice. The notes of the pipe rose then to a strange crescendo. There was a moment of beauty all round me such as I shall never feel again, and out of that beauty Morning Glory stepped away, and the three girls after her.

" That tide of music that drifted them away submerged me and left me gasping. I did rise to my feet and take a few steps and clutch Morning Glory by the sleeve, but she looked so surprised that my hand dropped.

" I never saw her or any of them again. When they had climbed some way up that rocky slope the music suddenly stopped. Why

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they went to the mountain I never knew, or what called them. But I suppose I should have known. If Pan ever lived at all, he was immortal. And those mountains were just the place for him.

" From my three Arabs I could learn nothing. One of them when I asked him what it was, said, ' Doubtless the horned one.'

" ' But who is he ? Where does he come from ? ' I asked.

" ' From the days of ignorance,' he said. By which he meant that it was something from before the time of the Prophet.

" ' And the girls,' I said, ' where are they gone ? '

" ' To the mountain,' he said.

" I got no more out of him. Mirages, stories of *djinns*, solid things such as rocks and camels, he took just as they came. If he heard music, the music was there ; if the girls were not there, they were gone : he did not seem interested in any cause.

" Here in London I don't know what to make of it. But there in that valley of the Ouled Naïl mountains, with the mystery of the Sahara lapping against it like an enormous sea, things that seem strange to us here seemed simple enough. It was certainly nothing earthly. And I didn't believe in her *djinns*. I don't see what else it could have been but Pan.

" Well, nothing remained then but to get away from the Ouled Naïl who were after me. And that, by going with our camels through the pass called the Path of Blood, and then well away to the North, we easily did.

" Certainly, whatever it was, I heard some very fine music."

Two of our members were by now asleep, Terbut had been silenced by his rebuffs, I ordered a whisky for Jorkens, and the rest of us, by a certain reluctance to comment, appeared to reserve judgment.

* * *

AVEC DU VIN?

Oscar Wilde found himself at a weekend houseparty of athletic tendencies, and agreeable occupations for Sunday afternoon were being discussed at lunch. Everybody wanted to be out of doors, and to play some game. There was golf, there was tennis, there were boats on the river for those who could row, and water in the river for those who could swim.

When asked what he would like to do, he sighed. " I am afraid I play no outdoor games at all, except dominoes," he said, " I have sometimes played dominoes outside French cafés."

Told by E. F. BENSON,
in "As We Were, A Victorian Peep Show"

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THE GREEN MACHINE

"Nobody," they vowed, "must *ever* know!"

by RAY BRADBURY

THE first thing they did was run up into the hot attic and slam the door.

"Do you think they'll find us here?" cried Miss Lavinia.

"Hold on to me, I'm scared!" cried Miss Roberta wildly, clutching at her old, pale sister.

They both peered out of the mysterious attic through the little dusty windows at the fresh green summer lawn below them. A small boy walked by bouncing a ball. A man across the street watered his lawn, playing the water like a baton over and across the glittering grass.

"All's quiet!" said Miss Lavinia in a hoarse whispering shout.

There was a sound in the attic like little grey rats scurrying, but it was only the small hearts of the two elderly ladies as they held on to each other like two toppling grey statues atop an abandoned house.

"How did it happen? Oh, how did we get into this trouble?" mourned Lavinia now, settling into a corner. She resembled a large comfortable piece of furniture there.

Roberta was physically opposite; she was thin and lizardy and now she was weeping. "They'll hunt us out, they'll arrest us and hold us. We shouldn't have run away."

"We didn't *mean* to do it," confided Miss Lavinia, looking at her thin sister hopefully. They lied to each other, nodding their heads. "It was all an accident and we lost our senses."

"If only, only, *only* we had never seen that man from Great Gumport!" said Miss Roberta, suddenly remembering an excuse. "*He's* the one! Him and his Green Machine, Seats Two People, Easy Steering, Extra Mileage!"

Lavinia sat remembering it all softly, sadly. "It was such a pretty machine," she recalled, eyes shut.

"Engine of the devil!" said Roberta, but didn't really mean it.

"And we paid our money out of our hiding places for it; all because Mr. Hancock of Great Gumport squeezed the sponge bulb

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horn of that Green Machine and told us how nice it was to sit on the leather cushions and glide along the streets ! "

Now they both remembered. It was only last week. The young man, trotting briskly up the pavement under the afternoon shady trees, had greeted them as if he'd known them all his life, and, in truth, they had never seen him before. " You're just the ladies I'm looking for," he had shouted, happily. " My name is Hancock ; look down there ! " And he had flourished his hand, a magician's flourish.

And there in the magical afternoon of golden light and green shade, on the pavement before their chocolate brown house, stood the Green Machine, Seats Two People, Easy Steering, Electric Batteries, Wonderful For Invalids ! He smiled and handed the rustly slick papers, all illustrated, and he talked like soft rain on a summer roof. They had looked at him coldly, at first, but then they softened with his talk and their eyes gleamed and their hands, which they had tightened across their bosoms to repel him, came loose and dropped, amazed, to their laps.

" Won't you give it a try ? " he asked. " Or let me demonstrate ? "

Before they could speak, he had glided by the house sedately, tipping his hat solemnly from within the silent running Green Machine. He circled the street. He returned, bowing again, slowly, wonderfully, steering the rubber wheeled miracle with one easy, nonchalant, gloved hand.

He drove up before the porch, on the warm pavement, and bulbed the horn in a pinching hand, smiling.

There was a minute of silence.

Miss Roberta was the first one down the porch steps to pinch the horn . . .

" And so we bought it ! " remembered Miss Roberta, in the attic, horrified at their nerve. She accused her sister.

" Well," was Lavinia's stout defence, " my hip's bothered me for years, and you always get tired walking, and it seemed so nice and refined and regal and quiet, like the old days when women wore hoop skirts. They *glided* all the time. The Green Machine glided, and seemed very polite and proper."

" What was *that* ? " They both jumped, startled.

Down below, somebody rapped on the back door.

" We've been followed, they'll arrest us ! " and both of them wept again. " Shh ! Oh, that horrid man who sold us the Green Machine ! "

They had shaken their teapots like tambourines until the money fell all over the kitchen table in rattles and jitters. The salesman made them sign a contract : one hundred pounds down, fifteen a month

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for six months. Free driving lessons. Easy to steer. Like an excursion boat. There was just a kind of handle you touched with your hand, so. You started the engine by turning a switch. It was electrical. You charged it every night. It ran like a whisper.

Oh, that glorious week! Humming through the shady town on rubber rollers, seated stiffly, smiling at passing acquaintances, Miss Lavinia and Miss Roberta, neither of them a day under seventy, sedately putting out their wrinkled claws at every turn, squeezing a hoarse cry from their black rubber bulb horn at crossroads, paying no attention to small boys who ran squealing along beside them, talking to the old ladies—that's how slowly the Green Machine travelled: only fifteen miles an hour at full speed. They came and went through the hot summer sunlight and shadow, their faces freckled and stained by the passing trees, going and coming like an ancient, wheeled dream.

"And then," whispered Lavinia, "this afternoon, oh, this horrible afternoon!"

"We couldn't help it, it was an accident," insisted Roberta.

"But we ran away, and that's criminal," cried Lavinia.

This afternoon. Time faded and reassembled in images: the smell of the leather cushions under their bodies, the grey perfume smell of their own sachets trailing back as they moved in their silent Green Machine through the small, languorous town.

It had happened quickly. Rolling softly on to the pavement at noon, because the only shade was on the pavement itself, they had glided to a blind corner, bulbing their throaty horn.

Suddenly, like a jack-in-the-box an old man tottered out from nowhere!

"Look out!" screamed Miss Lavinia.

"Look out!" screamed Miss Roberta.

"Look out!" cried the old man.

The two women grabbed each other instead of the steering wheel.

There was a terrible thud. The Green Machine sailed on in the hot daylight, under the shady chestnut trees, past the ripening apple trees. Looking back only once, the two old ladies' eyes filled with faded horror.

The old man lay on the pavement, silent.

"And here we are," mourned Lavinia in the darkening attic. "Oh, why didn't we stop? Why did we run away?"

"Shh!" They listened.

Downstairs, the rapping came again.

When it ceased, they saw a figure cross the lawn in the dim light. "Only Mrs. Haggarty come to borrow some sugar." They sighed.

The sun was setting. "We've been in the attic all afternoon,"

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said Roberta, tiredly. " It's late. We can't stay here for three weeks, hiding, till people forget, can we ? "

They considered it. " We'd starve. What shall we do, then ? " They surveyed the street. " Do you suppose anyone saw and followed us ? " They blinked at each other.

" No. No one saw."

The town was silent, all the tiny houses switching on lights. There was a smell of watered grass and suppers cooking far away.

" Time to put on the pork chops," said Miss Lavinia. " Tom'll be coming home in ten minutes."

" Dare we go down ? "

" Tom'd 'phone the police if we vanished. That would only make things worse."

The sun went swiftly. Now they were only two moving silhouettes in the musty blackness. " *Do you think he's dead ?* "

" The old man ? "

A pause. " Yes."

" We'll buy an evening paper."

They opened the attic door to peer carefully at the dusty steps leading down. " Oh, if Tom hears of this, he'll take our Green Machine away from us, and it was so lovely riding and getting the cool breeze and seeing all the town."

" We won't tell Tom straight away."

" No, we'll wait as long as we can."

They helped each other by their thin elbows down the creaking stairs to the second floor, making themselves statues to listen. Then, rustling to the kitchen, they peeped into dark moist pantries, peeped out of shaded windows with frightened eyes, and finally set to work frying pork chops.

After five minutes of motion and silence, Lavinia glanced sadly over at Roberta and said, " I've been thinking."

" What ? "

" We're ancient and feeble and don't like to admit it. We're dangerous. And we owe a debt to society for running off—"

" And . . . ? "

" We won't say anything to Tom. We'll just fry his supper very nicely and talk pleasantly and pretend nothing's wrong, and after supper we'll tell him we're going for a little walk. And we'll go down to the police station to tell them what happened. It's the only thing we can do."

" Yes."

They sat on the kitchen chairs, looking at the floor.

" And one more thing . . ."

" What ? "

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A special silence fell on the frying in the room as the two sisters faced each other, their hands empty.

" I think that . . ." Lavinia stared at the simmering pork chops for a long time, " —we shouldn't drive our Green Machine ever again."

Roberta picked up a plate and turned it over and over in her hands. " Not ever ? " she said.

" Never."

" But," said Roberta, " we don't have to—to get rid of it, do we ? We can keep it, can't we ? "

Lavinia considered this. " Yes, I suppose we can keep it if we lock it in the garage."

Roberta nodded. " At least that'd be something. I'll go out now and disconnect the batteries."

Roberta was walking slowly through the front door just as Tom, their younger brother, only fifty six, entered.

" Hello, girls ! " he cried.

Roberta brushed past him without a word and went slowly into the summer dusk. Tom was carrying a newspaper which Lavinia immediately snatched. Trembling, she searched it through and through and, sighing, gave it back to him.

" Supper ready ? " he asked, bright eyed as a crow.

" Yes." Lavinia set the kitchen table, placing each knife and fork carefully. " We're going for a little walk after supper, Tom, just Roberta and I."

" Fine, fine. Do you good to walk." He smiled.

Then the sound came. They both heard it and turned.

There was a hoarse, bulbing cry from outside in the summer twilight, like some strange bird. Once, twice, three times the lost cry came.

" What's that ? " Tom peered from the kitchen window into the dusk. " What's Roberta up to ? Look at her out there, by the garage, just sitting in the Green Machine, pinching the rubber horn."

Twice more, in the cool night, like some mournful animal, the bulbing sound was pinched out.

" What's got into her ? " demanded Tom.

" You just leave her alone ! Don't say a *word* ! " screamed Lavinia.

Tom looked surprised. A moment later, Roberta entered quietly, without looking at anybody, and they all sat down to supper.

* * *

It is not nice to be wedded to anything—not even to a theory.

SAMUEL BUTLER, 1835-1902, *Note-Books*

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COBWEBS AND CREAM

To be taken with a pinch of salt—thrown, of course, over the left shoulder

They stole her from the well beside the wood.
Ten years ago as village gossips tell ;
One Beltane-eve when trees were all a-bud
In copse and fell.

Ominous, vast, the moon rose full and red
Behind dim hills ; no leaf stirred in the glen
That breathless eve, when she was pixy-led
Beyond our ken.

For she had worn no rowan in her hair,—
Nor set the cream-bowl by the kitchen door,—
Nor whispered low the pagan faery prayer
Of ancient lore . . .

BERNARD SLEIGH

The Mpopo-Popo Bird

Bishop Joram said there was a bird in Mngangaland called the Mpopo-popo, rather like an owl, he said, except that it squinted and was featherless for the greater part of the year.

Mrs. Brandon said she did not think she would like it.

" It is quite harmless, I assure you, Mrs. Brandon," said the Bishop earnestly. " It is supposed to be the spirit of a great chief called Mpopo. The chiefs there have of course a great many souls, and the very large number of Mpopo-popo birds proves what a powerful chief he was. All children who squint are supposed to be children of Mpopo, so their mothers used to be killed to punish them for entertaining the spirit of Mpopo. When I say entertaining," added Bishop Joram hastily, " I do not wish—"

" We all know perfectly well what you mean, Bishop," said Francis kindly. " You have no idea how biological communications have corrupted good manners while you were in the bush. And I don't see how one can get out of entertaining people's spirits, which I suppose can materialize anywhere."

Mrs. Arbuthnot, who was afraid she might have the giggles and so distress the Colonial Bishop, quickly asked if they still killed the squinters' mothers.

" I regret to say that I had to put a stop to that," said Bishop Joram. " One must move with the times, though no one regrets

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the passing of old customs more than I. I happened to have a lantern slide of one of the Easter Island statues and I told them it was Mpopo himself, come to tell them that all mothers of squinters were sacred. It was a shot in the dark, but it convinced them, only unfortunately I had forgotten that women sacred to the gods are starved to death, so it all came to much the same."

ANGELA THIRKELL, *Private Enterprise*

Cure for Ague

Six middling-size cobwebs.

JOHN WESLEY, 1703–1791, *Primitive Physic*

True Love-Knot

To know whom one shall marry. You must lie in another county, and knit the left garter about the right legged stocking—let the other garter and stocking alone—and as you rehearse these following verses, at every comma, knit a knot.

This knot I knit,
To know the thing, I know not yet,
That I may see,
The man that shall my husband be,
How he goes, and what he wears,
And what he does, all days, and years.

Accordingly in your dream you will see him: if a musician, with a lute or other instrument; if a scholar, with a book or papers.

A gentlewoman that I knew, confessed in my hearing, that she used this method, and dreamt of her husband whom she had never seen: about two or three years after, as she was on Sunday at church (at Our Lady's church in Sarum), up pops a young Oxonian in the pulpit: she cries out presently to her sister, this is the very face of the man that I saw in my dream.

JOHN AUBREY, 1626–1697, *Miscellanies*

Q.E.D.

The widow Comon was put into the river to see if she would sink because she was suspected to be a witch and she did not sink but swim.

JOHN BUFTON, *of Coggeshall, Essex, in a diary*, 1699

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Horse Sense

In a Norwegian paper devoted to agriculture a correspondent writes: "One of my neighbours a couple of years ago mated his mare with his stallion at noon and in bright sunshine. He realized immediately that there was danger of the foal being too light, and he was right in his forebodings, for the following spring the mare produced a light dun foal. Last year he again paired the mare and the stallion, but late in the evening, and in order to be on the safe side, he covered the mare's head with an old black coat. What happened? Well, this year the mare produced a dark dun foal."

Then there is the recent case of a farmer in Connemara who owned a splendid mare from which he hoped to breed a Derby winner. To achieve his ambition he paid a very high fee at stud. But, to his great consternation, when the foal was born it was nothing better than a piebald circus pony. He has not yet recovered from his grief, but he explains that the fault was entirely his own, giving, as his reason, the fact that he grazed the mare in a field which adjoined one in which there were spotted cattle.

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Sweet Thames Run Softly*

Acorn Cup and Ashen Key

Acorn cup and ashen key,
Bid my true love come to me—
Between moonlight and firelight,
Bring him over the hills tonight;
Over the meadows, over the moor,
Over the rivers, over the sea,
Over the threshold and in at the door,
Acorn cup and ashen key,
Bring my true love back to me.

Old charm, to be repeated at night, an acorn and an ash sprig having been placed beneath the pillow

Moderation in All Things

A gentlewoman told an ancient bachelor, who looked very young, that she thought he must have eaten snakes; and received the reply: "No mistris, it is because I never meddled with snakes that maketh me look so young."

THOMAS FULLER, 1608–1661,
The Holy State and the Profane State

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THE NIGHT THE BRICK CAME THROUGH THE WINDOW

"We'll have to move," she said

by J. T. STORY

NOT until we got old enough to stop running and say "The hell!" did we have any real rest from my mother's second husband. He pursued our family like a dark ghoul—although I understand he tended towards ginger—throughout my childhood, and yet I was never entirely convinced of his existence as a person. For my mother, I'm certain, he was a kind of personified calamity—something shocking that happened round about nineteen twenty and recurred at odd intervals for a long time afterwards. Since this definition might apply equally well to a war, a depression, a cyclone or your Uncle Arthur, there is little wonder that we children came to regard him simply as a symbol of hard times. My sister, who is older than I am, remembers him very vaguely as a shadow, a mumble, a laugh, a slammed door, a maid's giggle. But you can't make a stepfather out of that.

Whatever he was, he kept us running. He turned up here, he turned up there, he turned up mostly everywhere. But still I only saw the effect without the cause.

I remember coming into the little cottage at Burwell where we were in hiding at the time, and hearing a commotion in my mother's room. My sister was in the kitchen, frowning.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"They're fighting," my sister said. "Mother's got the scissors."

Apparently our stepfather had turned up while we were at school and upset mother. Nobody could do it better. But when we came home from the club that evening mother was polishing the floor and humming *Beulah Land*, which had been my grandfather's favourite hymn before he died of anthrax.

That night, sitting round the fire, my mother told us that our stepfather had once killed a black man on a fair ground: tied him up with rope and thrown him in a canal.

"We shall have to move," she said.

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Such appearances, manifestations, or even just a vivid recollection of her second husband were usually sufficient to change the immediate course of our lives. The progress of our family was like that of an enthusiastic driver, veering frantically one way and then the other to miss something he's just passed. So we took a sweet shop in the High Street.

The shop was a small thatched cottage with a display window at the front. How my mother had the courage to open a business at this time I don't know, for her only asset in this direction was her handwriting which, she prided herself, was extremely business-like. This sloping, spontaneous, bold hand brought us sufficient credit from Cambridge wholesalers to stock the shop with aniseed balls.

Although this commodity is not one of life's necessities and was not in frantic demand, it did satisfy absolutely the craving of those people who crave aniseed balls. These addicts soon learned that, at any time, in any weather and no matter what important things were happening elsewhere, we could always be relied upon to supply aniseed balls. Our shop never closed.

Unfortunately, it soon transpired that only eight people in Burwell and the surrounding district had a sustained interest in aniseed balls, including Charlie Bridgeman, a carter from Tithe Farm; Billie Doe, the Crier; and old Sarah, a lady from the alms-houses who could only afford two ounces every other pension day.

When it became obvious that we could not keep a business solvent on that kind of trade, my mother wrote another letter. This brought us whipped cream walnuts, chocolate and coconut snowballs, cachews in glass tubes, and ice cream. Luckily my sister was at an age to attract stable boys, apprentice jockeys, farm hands and elderly gentlemen, and the business began to expand in the traditional manner. After all, many of the large chain stores started with nothing bigger than aniseed balls. Soon we were stocking snuff, birthday cards, and a whole range of cigarettes which my mother insisted on reciting whenever anybody came into the shop with nicotined fingers and a cough.

Although the shop was soon earning sufficient to keep us and pay the rent, we could not at the same time afford to pay the wholesalers for the stock. Just before they started to prosecute, however—it was about the time of the fifth "last" letter—a fat man came into the shop and offered to install three slot machines. This was the beginning of our golden era.

These machines were owned by a Newmarket company, and the amazing thing about them was that everybody benefited from them. For a period of time, we all won money—the shop, the

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company and even the customers. We should have realized that eventually they would have to be made illegal.

The machines themselves were the kind you now find only in arcades on piers or promenades—except that now the philanthropic characteristics seem to have been modernized out of them. In our machines the customer inserted a penny which released a ball. He triggered this ball round a vertical, spiral track and, nine times out of ten, delivered it into a winning cup. Then he pressed a button and got his ball back together with a metal disc valued at threepence, sixpence, ninepence or a shilling, for negotiation over our counter.

This obviously satisfied the customer, for he could get twenty cigarettes or a half pound box of chocolates for a penny, and as the company gave us equal money for the discs we were holding, besides the extra amount of business we did, we were on the winning side, too. And it seemed that the company were delighted, too, for when they called to empty the machines every few weeks they gave us half of the takings as an additional profit.

Our little shop became the centre of attraction on Sunday afternoons in these halcyon, pre-brick days. I was nine years old and the year was about 1926. A four piece jazz band was playing *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Nebraska*, *When the Red Red Robin*, *Black Bottom*, *Shepherd of the Hills*, *I'm Alone because I Love You*, *I Don't Mind being All Alone*, and *Ukelele Lady* at the Memorial Hall; steam organs on the fairground behind the *White Hart* measured out *Valencia* and *On the Shores of Minetonka;* Steve Donaghue, Freddie Foxe and Walter Elliot were to be seen locally, and on Thursdays and Saturdays a mobile film unit came round—so that altogether everybody had a pretty good time.

Aniseed balls and gob-stoppers being a distinct social advantage among the younger set at that time, I had a lot of friends in the village. We bathed naked in the fen rivers, cut bows from ash trees and arrows from reed beds, which we tipped wickedly with elder stick from which the pith had been removed, or tin points from cocoa tins. And then when Al Capone came into vogue we switched to air guns and blank cartridge pistols with the end sawn off, augmented by hideous home-made bombs.

Under the idyllic pretence of gleaning, we stole corn and sold it for chicken food, robbed orchards and got birched—luckily, the last thief hanging that took place in Newmarket was, I believe, round the turn of the eighteenth century. We backed horses with the village barber, but we all knew too much about racing ever to lose, and eventually the barber affected religious convictions and refused to take bets from anybody under twelve.

Those tuneful twenties were the glorious roughage of my life.

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No discipline—although we children insisted on my mother being in by ten—no honesty, no fine thoughts with a little wickedness here and there. It was a happy and essential phase of my life—of anybody's life. And it was brought to an end by a brick hurled through our bedroom window at one o'clock in the morning. A brick which sent broken glass over the bed and my mother running for the police.

We were sleeping in the front bedroom over the shop when we were awakened by the crash and clatter and thump of bricks, stones and bits of old iron. My mother, who rushed into the room, took in the situation at a glance. It was almost as though she had expected something like this to happen. Things had been going smoothly and well for too long, and she had been brooding over it, alert, keyed up, expectant—even, I suspect, impatient.

"Keep down!" my mother cried. "For pity's sake, keep down!"

We kept down, all of us. We crouched in the dark room—"Don't light the lamp or you'll give him a target!"—close up against the front wall, while heavy missiles crashed through the window and across the room, breaking up a marble topped wash-stand which my mother had bought secondhand at Highgate in 1910, and desecrating a portrait of my great grandfather's mother. The whole window—an attractive, leaded affair, set attic-wise in the thatched roof—was shattered to fragments, and the lead hung like grey macaroni.

"It's him!" my mother kept muttering. "It's him!"

When it appeared to be all over, we rose stealthily and peered down into the High Street. It was grey and deserted. Across the road on a piece of waste land stood an advertising hoarding.

"That's where he hid," my mother explained.

We went for the police, of course, and we went together, for although the constable's house was only four or five hundred yards away at the top of The Causeway, they were dark yards, and there was a man skulking out there who had already killed a black man and thrown him into a canal.

The constable had two large sons, and he brought them back with him. He regarded the chaos of our room and the terrorized condition of its occupants for several minutes. Then he asked my mother if she had any enemies.

My mother told him, with conviction, that her second husband had done it, as though the attack had been duly signed and witnessed.

"I wish I'd never married him," she said, "although that's a wicked thing to say, I know." To my mother, marriage of any kind was sacred.

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But the constable was obviously doubtful whether a second husband would do a thing like that.

" It's likely them machines of yours," he told my mother.

This accusation against three inanimate slot machines did not sound so fantastic to my mother as it might have done, since she, being townbred and of a business turn of mind, had always suspected that most of our village neighbours, although kind, were steeped in stupid pagan beliefs and superstitions.

" How could the machines get out ? " she argued, reasonably. " The shop door is kept locked."

But the constable was more rational than she gave him credit for. What he meant was that certain of the villagers did not like the slot machines in our shop, regarding them as gambling machines, demoralizing and wicked. I daresay that this opposition was started by some incredibly unlucky person who had lost a penny.

That this resentment against our slot machines was very real was proven not long afterwards when somebody sent a letter to the company at Newmarket saying that they had seen my brother forcing a machine open late at night to extract money while my mother held a candle.

Most people of character ignore anonymous letters, and so do newspapers, but not the slot machine company at Newmarket. They came one Wednesday evening and collected the three machines, saying that Parliament had just made them illegal. If this was really so, then a shop down the village started breaking the law with those same machines three days later. My mother, going into this shop on the pretext of buying darning wool, identified the machines by the marks my brother had made with his penknife.

Very soon we lost our customers, and my sister lost all her admirers except those who liked aniseed balls, to which we were once again reduced. My mother, an enterprizing woman, tried several other lines as a last resort, but without much success in the end.

She had a business adviser called Bert who drove the ice lorry, and he told her that she could buy and sell fish at three or even four hundred per cent profit. So mother wrote another letter, and soon we were having fish from Grimsby, packed in ice and saltpetre and costing only seven and sixpence a barrel.

It was amazing how much fish we got for seven and sixpence and how much they could stack in one barrel. On delivery day we used to push the aniseed balls to one side and stack the stuff on the counter, the shelves and even on the floor, which was red-ochred. Lying there, all cold and wet, it looked worth a fortune to somebody. Well, it might have been—to somebody.

We children went round from door to door with tomato boxes

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strung decoratively in front of us by cords taken from the broken window. In these trays we carried cod, mackerel, haddock, kippers, bloaters, herrings, rock salmon and lots of white fleshy things that might have been anything. For these latter objects I found a ready customer in Mr. Macbeth, the chemist, and although he invariably asked me how long they had been dead, I did not put any morbid significance on the transaction until some time afterwards when I went to work for him.

For a while we made a good profit on the fish, and then the hot weather beat us. We switched quickly to ice cream, spending many early morning hours in the cellar churning the metal container round and round in the cask packed with ice. We did fairly well with this, too, until the cold weather beat us and we were back to fish. 1927 was one of those fish, ice cream, fish, ice cream kind of years; and finally my mother, flustered, got vanilla flavouring mixed up with a whole load of kippers and we lost all our customers, including the hard core of aniseed eaters.

Now we were approaching the end of our brief prosperity and returning to normal. The Hill jazz band still played *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Red Red Robin*, *Black Bottom* and *Nebraska*; the steam organs still measured out *Valencia* and *On the Shores of Minetonka*, and all the other gay things were happening, but the shadow of the bailiff danced the Charleston over our house.

The landlord, Mr. Crack, a thin blacksuited fellow, began criticizing the way we had treated his property, taking exception to the broken window in our bedroom and the fact that we had been forced to chop up two apple trees and a large outhouse to eke out the peat during the general strike. Also, he wanted two months' rent.

My mother, naturally enough, blamed her second husband entirely. First the brick, then the letter to the slot machine company at Newmarket.

"We'll have to move," she said.

* * *

MADAM!

After a Town Hall meeting in a western American city, a woman went up to speak to the late Alexander Woollcott. The woman's grandchildren were grown and she freely admitted having passed seventy.

"I was encouraged to speak to you," she said, "because you said you loved old ladies."

"Yes," replied Woollcott gallantly, "I do. But I also like them your age." *Coronet*

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THE STRANGE ONE

"You just wait and see," he said, "just wait and see!"

by N. R. LAMBURN

IT was one of those dark winter evenings which draws humans to a roaring fire, as moths to a candle.

We sat there, Ned, Jeremiah and I, deep in our high backed chairs, which shielded us from the unknown shadows of the room. We all smoked pipes; good, time-tested briars, and slowly the pleasant, stinging aroma of tobacco mingled with the sweet scent of burning apple wood.

We were old, Ned, Jeremiah and I, and once settled, we had no urge to stir. The silence was full of flitting memories, memories stretching back over eighty years. And because they were our life, horses were the memories.

Ned had been that rare and precious thing—the perfect head groom to a racing stable. His memories were the fleetest, full of thundering hooves; the roar of the winning post; the clank of a bucket in the cold early morning; the long, silent strings of horses stepping through the mysterious six o'clock mist on the dew drenched downs; the smell of saddle soap, and the feel of good leather; the straining muscles and flared nostrils of the racer; and the last, sad ride of the finished racehorse.

Jeremiah had been a horse dealer, and his memories were rough, full of plunging, unbroken animals, kickers, rearers, or those quiet, patient horses whose sad eyes told you they knew the only money they would ever fetch would be from the knackers.

I had been a whip, the best whip in England, they said. I had looked after m'lord's string of hunters, been with him since I was a lad of fourteen. My memories were of the hunting field, the shrill of the horn and the music of our hounds; the thrill of the full cry and the sting of twigs against my body, as we rose, my horse and I, over some tricky hedge; the last gallop to the kill and then the slow jog home through the darkening evening.

Suddenly a log broke, sending up a shower of sparks like golden rain. I stirred and looked at Jeremiah.

"Jeremiah," I said slowly, "have you ever been afraid of a horse?"

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There was a long pause and the listening shadows crept nearer.

"Yes," he said at last. "Yes. Just one . . .

It was a long time ago, when I had my place in the Midlands.

I had to go over to Ireland to see some animals. They were selling cheap and I'd been tipped they were real good ones. I had never been there before and I was unprepared for the bleak weather that greeted me.

I shivered as I sat in the gig, open to the wind that howled over the countryside. The horses would have to be very good to make up for this.

But they were good. Very good indeed. And my journey was well worth it. Their owner was going to America and was only too pleased to get rid of the horses, into, I assured him, good hands.

After the deal the Irishman walked down to the gates with me. As we neared the waiting gig, he said very casually, very quietly, that he had another animal, a four year old, that I could have.

Irish whisky is potent and besides, I had to catch my boat for I didn't want to stay a minute longer than was necessary. So I told the owner to send the animal over with the others, and away I went, trusting him—the Irishman.

One fine, crisp morning a fortnight later the Irish horses arrived. The air was cold and clear and my feet crunched loudly on the gravel path as I walked briskly down from the cottage. A feeling of expectancy electrified the air. It was the kind of morning when things happened.

The yard was a big open space of earth, pounded down by countless hooves to a hard surface. Round this there were loose-boxes, half of them empty, the other half with heads looking interestedly over the doors. There were gates at each end of the enclosure, one leading out into the paddocks and the other to the road, which ran on down the valley to the big town.

As I straightened up from examining the horse, I heard the clatter of hooves along the road outside. I went out into the yard to watch the Irish animals come in.

Ten horses stepped into the yard, heads tossing, breath clouding in the sharp air. But although I observed every detail of the animals, my mind wasn't really on them. I waited impatiently for the unknown one—the horse I had thought about so much during the past two weeks, wondering whether I would regret that hasty purchase, or not.

Then I caught my breath. He was the last to come into the yard, and his beauty outshone the beauty of all those others. Jet black he was, from the tip of his small pointed ears, to the end of his flowing silky tail, with not a white speck on the whole of his magnificent

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body. Fully sixteen hands high, he stood poised, head high, against the whitewashed stable wall. Not a muscle moved and we stood hushed in the presence of so much beauty.

Then slowly the stallion turned his proud head and looked straight at me. I saw his eyes and the first dart of fear pierced my heart. They were as full of hate as the sea is of water. For a moment we gazed at each other, horse and man, and then I turned.

" Water the animals, boys," I said gruffly, for my voice was shaking. " Then turn them into the paddock. All except the black stallion," I added. " Put him in there, Harry," and I pointed to the special loosebox kept for the more restive of our horses.

All at once the yard lost that peculiar stillness and came alive again. The horses were led to the troughs and drank eagerly, flicking their ears backwards and forwards as they swallowed. One by one they raised their dripping muzzles and were led away to the paddock. I stood watching as, free at last, they rolled, legs thrashing, until they heaved themselves up, shook, and settled down to sample the grass of their new land.

I'd made a really good buy, and I congratulated myself. The nightmare journey to Ireland was forgotten in my pride.

I turned from the gate as the head groom touched me on the shoulder. Harry was a small man, and had a judgement of horses that was infallible. He looked up at me now, with his bright, humorous blue eyes glinting from his wrinkled brown face.

" Nice lot, ain't they, sir ? " he said.

" Yes, Harry," I replied slowly. " We've certainly got a good string there. Did you put the black away ? "

" Yes, sir," he answered as we strolled across the yard. " And he ought to be put away in more senses than one."

I didn't answer.

So he'd seen that look, too ? And a drop more of the poison of fear filtered into my heart.

The stallion was prowling round his box like a huge black panther. When we looked in he stopped, and glared at us through the half light of the stable. Then, laying back his ears he lifted a foreleg and crashed it against the door, leaving it shivering with the impact. It was a challenge, I knew, and one I had no wish to take up. So I turned away from those hate filled eyes and went out into the sunshine again.

Harry and I parted without a word, he to the harness room and I back to my cottage. And as I walked home through that crisp autumn morning, I couldn't get rid of the look in that stallion's eye.

That evening, before dinner, I went down to the stables alone to look over the new arrivals. They were scattered over the paddock,

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grazing; or just standing, heads drooping, eyes half closed, dreaming away the darkening evening.

The rooks, cawing gratingly on the still air, flapped their heavy way homewards to the tall elms; and the stinging aroma of burning leaves drifted slowly from the garden.

But the air was chill, and I turned back through the yard, buttoning up my coat. I meant to go in to see Harry, but some fatal fascination drew me towards the loosebox instead.

The big stallion was standing quietly, head drooping, when I looked through the bars. I had an urge to touch the animal, to see if so much beauty could be real, and so, picking up a broom, I slipped the bolts of the door. Opening it slightly, I thrust the broom handle in and touched the horse lightly on the shoulder. With a squeal of rage the animal lunged towards the door, and dropping the broom, I only just had time to bolt it before the whole weight of the stallion was flung against it. And through the bars I saw those flaming eyes blazing hate at me.

I stood leaning against the wall, breathing hard. It wasn't that this had never happened to me before. It had, many times. But it was the pure hate in those great eyes that paralyzed me, and sent slow tentacles of fear creeping round my heart. For they were the eyes of a killer, and I knew he was only waiting his chance and then, with one disdainful flick of a hoof, he would send me to Kingdom Come.

I roused myself, wiping my damp hands on my coat. This couldn't go on. I'd have to sell it—or shoot it. And as I moved away, the stallion resumed his prowling, snorting as he padded round.

Next morning, I went to the yard prepared for battle, but the black one seemed to have regained his temper, and there was very little likeness to the lashing, squealing fiend of the night before. It is true he bucked when Harry got up, but it seemed more in high spirits than in temper. And although I had decided again during my sleepless night that he must be got rid of, I knew when I saw him, with his coal black coat gleaming in the sun, that I could never bear to see this glorious pulsating body turned to a meaningless corpse. And I wondered for the hundredth time why such beauty could be so wicked.

After the morning's work I strolled up to Harry's cottage with him. He invited me in and I settled myself in one of the armchairs by the log fire. He bustled in from the kitchen with a mug of beer.

"Heard about Lord Jim Minewood?" he asked, as I took the beer.

"No," I said, "I thought he'd gone to Ireland for good. He was always fond of Ireland."

Harry winked at me, as he sat down opposite. "Wasn't Ireland

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he was fond of, sir, 'twas a lass out there. He's married her and is bringing her back to the manor to live."

"Minewood married?" I ejaculated. "I always thought he swore his only love was horses."

"Well, sir, she adores horses, too, so it's sort o' right. But she's not one of the gentry. A right wild 'un, she is, so they say. He met her out hunting in County Cork." Harry leaned forward and lowered his voice. "You should just hear the stories they tell about her. Some say she's a gypsy, and others—a changeling."

I snorted unbelievingly. "She's probably only a high spirited girl with rather wild ways. You know how rumour distorts."

Harry leaned back and grunted.

"You just wait and see," was all he said. "Just wait and see."

A few days later while I was crossing the yard a message was handed to me by a small boy on a grey pony. Lord Minewood and his wife were back, and he wished to buy a horse for her. Would it be convenient for them to come down that afternoon? I sent back a note saying 'yes' and went over to see Harry.

The boys were set to grooming the remaining Irish horses till their coats shone and every muscle rippled under the skin's sheen.

At three o'clock a smart green gig drove into the yard. I was eager to see the much discussed Lady Cathy and moved forward quickly to greet the couple. Lord Jim—as we called him—stepped down and turned to help his wife. As she stood up, I looked at her.

Lady Cathy was of middle height, and her bottle green riding habit fitted closely, accentuating her slimness. Her hair was a glorious black and as she came forward her proud and free bearing recalled to me the gypsy story, and I found it not so hard to believe. And there was about her a feeling of pent-up energy like a beautiful hound straining at its lead.

"This is my wife, Jeremiah," said Lord Jim proudly. "And the best horsewoman in Ireland."

As I took her hand I looked into her eyes. Great dark eyes that held a mocking wildness imprisoned there, eyes that were as unfathomable as the deepest waters of the ocean. For a moment I was startled. They somehow reminded me of those other eyes, there in the loosebox, both Irish, both wild.

Then remembering myself, I spoke. "Good afternoon," I said, bending over her hand. "Please let me wish you all happiness, and say that I am honoured to receive such an excellent horsewoman."

Lady Cathy turned to her husband. "You didn't tell me how charming the Englishmen are!" she remonstrated softly in her lilting Irish voice.

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" That was because I didn't want you to think about any Englishmen but me, Cathy," he replied, smiling down at her. He very plainly adored her and with one look from those eyes I knew she could get whatever she wanted.

" Come," she said, slipping her arm through his. " Let Jeremiah show us these horses."

Out from the farthest loosebox minced an iron grey mare—a perfect mount for a lady. Lady Cathy inspected her and I knew from the way she ran her hand down the mare's legs, looked at her teeth, and felt her body, that here indeed was a woman who knew a very great deal about horses.

I realized this even more when she called for a saddle and took the animal into the paddock. While we leaned on the gate, Lord Jim and I, she rode the mare round the field and with perfect assurance controlled her playfulness, and collected her into a steady canter. It was a glorious picture, the woman in the green habit riding the beautiful grey Irish mare.

When she returned to the gate I thought that she would take the mare, but I was wrong. When she dismounted, Lady Cathy shook her head. " Not this one, Jim."

And so it went on. She refused the bay, the chestnut and all the others. And the feeling brought on by the similarity of those two pairs of eyes became stronger and stronger until I knew for certain what would happen. But I fought the feeling off, and when Lady Cathy had rejected the last animal I shrugged my shoulders.

" I am afraid that is all that I can show you," I said.

" All, Jeremiah ? " she asked, smoothing her black hair back from her flushed face.

And at that moment a squeal of rage rang out from the special loosebox. We turned to stare and then Lady Cathy glanced at me with raised eyebrows.

" *All*, Jeremiah ? " she repeated.

I took a deep breath and said firmly, " That is not a mount for a lady. It is fit only for the devil to ride."

She threw back her head and a peculiar light came into her eyes. " I should like to see him. Bring him out."

" But—" I began.

Lord Jim's voice cut in sharply. " Jeremiah, you heard what my wife said. Bring him out."

I bit my lip and turned to Harry. " Bring out the black—if you can," I added under my breath.

Snorting and head snaking low, the black stallion came out into the yard at a trot. Then again he stood poised, and again that peculiar stillness fell.

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Her ladyship stepped forward. " Saddle him," she said exultantly. " I think this is the horse I am looking for."

As Lady Cathy went through the gate into the paddock I turned to the man beside me.

" That horse is no good," I said urgently. " No woman should be allowed near it, let alone on it. It's as evil as the devil and twice as wicked. Don't for goodness' sake let your wife buy it."

Lord Jim glanced at me in amazement. " My wife could ride anything on four legs, and if she's set her heart on it, who am I to stop her ? " He gazed over the paddock to where the horse and rider were cantering slowly round. " Any rate, he looks all right to me. Behaving perfectly."

I tried again. " But he does sometimes and then he gets these terrible fits. That's what makes him so dangerous. It's not safe for anyone then—not even for such a rider as your wife."

Lord Jim frowned. " Are you saying that that glorious animal is mean ? I really can't believe it."

" Mean ? " I echoed. " Just look at his eyes. Surely you can see his vicious soul in them ? Can't you realize before it's too late ? "

Lord Jim spoke angrily then. " My good man, don't you think my wife and I are the best judges of which horse we want ? A bit of firmness and kindness and the animal will be as quiet and as good as one of your ' perfect ladies' mounts ' ! "

But in spite of this outburst, I noticed he looked undecided as he watched the woman approach the gate.

Lady Cathy's face was radiant however. " This is the one I want," she said, exultantly.

Lord Jim cleared his throat. " Don't you think that the stallion is rather too strong for you, dearest ? " he asked worriedly, looking up at his wife. " Don't you think the grey would be better. After all, you've got to hunt it."

" Yes," I broke in urgently. " Are you sure that there isn't any other animal that would do ? "

Lady Cathy looked down from the stallion's back, and laughed lightly. " What ever's the matter with you both ? This is the horse I want, and this is the one I mean to have." She smiled down at her husband, a secret, intimate smile.

Lord Jim turned to me and shrugged almost apologetically. " You see what women are ? Set their heart on something and you can't deny them."

And so it was settled.

" I'll send the black stallion up this afternoon," I said as we waited for the gig to be brought forward.

" Now about payment," Lord Jim began. " I'll let you have—"

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I interrupted him firmly. "This is a wedding present to you and your wife. I'll take no payment for it."

Lord Jim looked at me queerly for a second, then turned to his wife. "Did you hear that, dearest? Jeremiah is giving you the horse for a wedding present."

She was so pleased that my conscience pricked. I knew I was only giving it to them because I wanted no fee for any accident that might happen.

Life went on much as usual, and I rarely saw the black stallion until the hunting season began. I wrote to the erstwhile owner, asking the reason for the animal's hatred of man, but I suppose the letter never got there, for he never replied.

When hunting began I don't think Lady Cathy missed one hunt, and she always came on the same horse—that black devil. I don't know if she was trying to wear him down, but if she was she didn't succeed. At each meet the animal was as fresh as before, and although he behaved no worse than any other high spirited horse, I knew he was only biding his time.

Lord Jim never spoke to me much after the conversation in the yard that fateful afternoon. And although I tried to warn him again and again about the horse, he took no notice. But I did notice that he hunted less and less during the season. I supposed he thought my judgement of horses was failing, but I know better now. I know he knew what I knew, but couldn't or wouldn't sell the animal.

Then came the last hunt of the season.

It was a raw February morning and as I rode out of the yard on my big boned chestnut, his breath clouded back through the cold still air. I shivered in my thick coat and blew on my fingers. The puddles along the road were coated with thin ice, and the chestnut snorted and shied excitedly every time he broke one. The hedges and trees were frosted and as the sun rose the drip, drip of melting frost accompanied me on my way.

By the time we got to the meet we were both hot, and as we joined the throng of champing, steaming horses, I saw Lady Cathy and the black stallion over under the oak. The animal looked magnificent, but she was having difficulty in holding him, and the signal to move off came none too soon. Already his shoulders were flecked with foam and the whites of his eyes showed wickedly. I looked round for Lord Jim, but he wasn't there.

We found quite soon and away we went. There weren't more than twenty in the field and the pace was fast. After the first long run there were only eight of us up with the hounds. I kept my eye on the black stallion, but he seemed to be going steadily enough. He thundered along, head down and great legs working tirelessly.

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Lady Cathy's face was flushed with the exultation of a fast gallop.

But I had the most horrible feeling of foreboding all through that hunt, and it was doubly worse because I knew I could do nothing to avert it.

The chestnut was jumping well and as I settled myself firmer into the saddle, I knew this would be a good run. My body was warmed by the gallop and my heart beat fast with the excitement that can come only from the music of the hounds, the thunder of hooves and a good horse under you.

I knew the country well, and as the field swept on over the rolling meadows, I forged ahead, until only the huntsman and the hounds were ahead of me.

The fox was game and thought he had lost the hounds when he slipped into the wide stream. But the dogs followed him, heads and sterns high above the water, swimming across to keep the trail.

The stream was wide, and the take off and landing were sticky. The best place was farther down to the right, but to take that route would mean probably losing the hounds. The huntsman's horse refused the jump three times before the man, red faced and angry, took him to the other place.

But I was feeling reckless that day and the excitement had gone to my head. Urging my chestnut on, I thundered towards the ribbon of water. Shortening the reins, I steadied the animal a few yards from the brink, and then squeezing the great body between my knees, I urged him on and up. Responding gallantly he leaped far out and over and for a second I saw the flash of silver as we soared up. Then, with a splash of hind legs in the water, we landed on the other side.

I stood up in my stirrups to ease the chestnut and patted his neck. Then I looked round to see if anyone was following. But everyone had gone down to the other jump, everyone, that is, but Lady Cathy. And even as I watched, the black stallion leaped strongly and easily over, taking the jump as if it were a mere brook. I let my breath out in relief. That pair certainly knew how to jump.

So now there were only two of us.

The stallion was gaining on my tiring chestnut and still seemed to be going as strongly as ever. As they passed me, I saw in a flash the woman's eyes. They were like no other eyes I have ever seen—filled with a light as wild as an Irish storm.

And as the hounds crept nearer and nearer to the wearying fox in his race with death, the feeling of fear that had hovered near me all day, closed in. I knew that I had to keep up with Lady Cathy if I killed the chestnut in doing it.

We were galloping along the ridge of a hill and suddenly the hounds turned sharply down to the right. At the bottom of the slope

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a huge bullfinch reared its thorny head and beyond it a silver gleam denoted another stream. The take off was bad—the landing was even worse, and only a madman would attempt it.

As we swung off after the hounds the chestnut stumbled and pecked. Swearing, I jerked him back on to his feet. I couldn't lose sight of Lady Cathy now.

But it was no good, for in the next few steps my horse had gone dead lame. I threw myself off and started in pursuit of the stallion. Then I stood horrified as I watched the woman vainly trying to hold the thundering brute as he charged down towards the bullfinch, trying with all the strength in her body to swing the great animal away down to the gate. But with his bit between his teeth and head low, the stallion flew on as though in a frenzy of hatred.

I don't think Lady Cathy had realized the strength of the stallion nor the height of the bullfinch when she turned down that fatal slope, for I'm sure she had no wish to die; and yet there seemed a wild joy, an unearthly freedom from fear in the last glimpse I caught of her beautiful white face.

And the feeling that had been with me all day crystallized into stark fear for Lady Cathy.

Now only a few yards from the hedge, the stallion drew himself back on his haunches and like a discus thrown from the arm of a giant, he sprang, seeming to forget the woman clinging to his back. Up and up he went, and then he was over. Over and down on his side, with legs flailing as he struggled in the mud to regain his feet.

When he stood at last, the woman lay still. But there was still hope for her. She might only be stunned. I started running down that hill again as I have never run before. Reaching the gate I vaulted over and stood transfixed. For with a deliberateness that was terrifying in itself, the black stallion reared up with a squeal that was more a shriek.

His ears laid close back and teeth bared, his forelegs flailing the air like the arms of a giant piston, he came down on the body of the woman again and again, until at the sight of me, as I stumbled forward with the small ineffectual hunting crop in my hand, the stallion turned and disappeared over the hill at a gallop.

Of course, it was too late to save her. She lay there, her broken body twisted in the mud, her green habit mired and torn. She still held her whip in one hand and those great eyes that only a few moments ago had been so alive, were turned to the green earth. I took off my coat and drew it gently over her face.

And standing there under the lowering sky, with no sound anywhere, I said goodbye to her. Perhaps there was an inescapable bond between them—those wild Irish creatures. Or perhaps the

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devil had come to claim his own. I don't know. All I do know was the look of stark suffering that Lord Jim turned on me when I told him. He never rode again.

Jeremiah's voice rumbled into silence.

"What happened to the animal?" I asked.

"No one knows," Jeremiah answered. "He was never seen again. Some say he was the devil, come back to claim his own. Perhaps he was, for there's a lot we mortals don't know. Nor ever shall."

Ned spoke slowly. "But so it always is to those whose lives are horses."

Once more silence fell over the room. The shadows sighed to each other in the corners. The fire crackled away to itself in the big iron grate. And over all lay the contentment that only comes from living a long, well lived life. For death is not so terrible when it is near.

And we were old, Ned, Jeremiah and I.

* * *

ANSWERS to FOOD OF LOVE on page 16

1. *Irene, in "The Forsyte Saga" by John Galsworthy.*
2. *The Jumblies, in Edward Lear's Nonsense Rhyme.*
3. *Sherlock Holmes, in the books by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.*
4. *The Young Squire, in Chaucer's Prologue to "The Canterbury Tales."*
5. *Bishop Blougram, in Robert Browning's poem "Bishop Blougram's Apology."*
6. *Winnie the Pooh, in A. A. Milne's book of that title.*
7. *Charles Lamb, in his "Essays of Elia."*
8. *Prince Agib, in Sir W. S. Gilbert's ballad.*
9. *Andrew Undershaft, in George Bernard Shaw's play "Major Barbara."*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Pedometer. 6, Ducks. 9, Penance. 10, Flemish. 11, Taft. 12, Adder. 13, Sped. 16, Paramount. 18, Carol. 19, Panda. 21, Contented. 23, Lynx. 24, Bully. 26, Host. 30, Gourmet. 31, Dry dock. 32, Tutor. 33, Yesterday.

Down. 1, Pipit. 2, Done for. 3, Mint. 4, Tread. 5, Reflect on. 6, Does. 7, Clipper. 8, Scheduled. 14, Smear. 15, Screw. 16, Pipelight. 17, Up-country. 20, Nonsuit. 22, Twofold. 25, Ladas. 27, Tokay. 28, Emir. 29, Fyne.

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DOWN TO EARTH

A garden was the primitive prison, till man . . . luckily sinned himself out of it

CHARLES LAMB, *in a letter*

Can any wind blow rough upon a blossom
So fair and tender?

JOHN FLETCHER, 1579–1625, *The Pilgrim*

Harvest Home

There is the "leaf-eating weevil," who does exactly what his name implies. There is the "woolly aphis," which attacks the sap of trees and bushes. There are the caterpillars which puncture fruit buds; there is the "capsid bug" which lays eggs beneath the bark . . . but there is still another pest remaining—the Choir!

Our nut orchard is located near to a famous old parish church, where choir boys in white surplices, with shining angelic faces, sing "All is safely gathered in" at Harvest Thanksgiving.

The boys do most of the "gathering in" so far as my nuts are concerned; between choir-practices, when nobody is looking.

If anyone aspires to a nut orchard, let him choose a site at least five miles away from a Choir—unless he likes music better than nuts.

LIEUT.-COL. T. A. LOWE, *Fruit Farm in England*

Primrose Path

A garden is like those pernicious machineries which catch a man's coat-skirt or his hand, and draw in his arm, his leg, and his whole body to irresistible destruction.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, 1803–1882,
The Conduct of Life

Matter of Form

His attitude to forms was very peculiar indeed. He could write only with difficulty, he could read simple statements only if they were in large print, and . . . he was utterly unable to understand the language which Civil Servants use when they try to make their orders and regulations clear to the ordinary man . . .

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They wanted to know whether his hens suffered from Fowl-pest or his black currants from Big Bud, and whether the wire netting he had applied for was to keep Rabbits (Domestic) in or Rabbits (Wild) out. Pestered as he was with these forms, William at last grew cunning and wary of them, and developed a sort of defensive mechanism against bureaucracy which for a season or two served him very well. He had learned by experience that forms bred like guinea pigs: the answer to any one question, even if a man could comprehend the question and write out the answer, engendered a litter of new questions each more troublesome than the last . . .

But these forms, he discovered, could nevertheless be gelded like tomcats by the simple process of writing NIL all over them. A nice short simple word, and you never heard any more from the clerks in their offices if you answered NIL to every question on the form. Having made this discovery, William no longer troubled to read the questions . . . he merely filled in each of the blank spaces with a large, blotchy and spidery NIL.

Later he improved on this method. Instead of NIL he wrote SEE OVER—actually he spelt it SEA OVER—and matched it with a second SEA OVER on the other side of the page. He had thought out this manœuvre very carefully, and for nearly two years it seemed to work like a charm. But Governments, like the Gods, remember everlastingly; and the time arrived when William's sins came home to roost like a flock of homing pigeons . . .

JOHN MOORE, *The Blue Field*

The Immortal Devil

. . . But even this strong weed-poison will have no effect on the dandelion . . . Now, what are we to do about this terrible plant who has seventy lives to a cat's seven, and still comes up, no matter how often he is cut down?

Well, if this almost immortal devil is in soft earth, dig his whole body up for cremation; taking care that not even one finger or toe, or even one joint of the same, is left in the earth; knowing as we do that he has enough vitality to grow a new body out of almost nothing. But if this persistent fellow is found in the hard path, what are we to do? . . . What I do in a case of this kind is to keep on chopping off his head as fast as he grows one; in the hope that at last, after losing about fifty heads or more, he will give way to despair and die of a broken heart. Needless to say . . . the public are not allowed to come near. This is because of my language.

W. H. DAVIES, 1870-1940, *My Garden*

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As with a Cobra

One would think that watering a little garden is quite a simple thing, especially if one has a hose. It will soon be clear that until it has been tamed a hose is an extraordinarily evasive and dangerous beast, for it contorts itself, it jumps, it wriggles, it makes puddles of water, and dives with delight into the mess it has made; then it goes for the man who is going to use it and coils itself round his legs; you must hold it down with your foot, and then it rears and twists round your waist and neck, and while you are fighting with it as with a cobra, the monster turns up its brass mouth and projects a mighty stream of water through the windows on to the curtains which have been recently hung.

You must grasp it firmly and hold it tight; the beast rears with pain, and begins to spout water, not from the mouth, but from the hydrant and from somewhere in the middle of its body. Three men at least are needed to tame it at first, and they all leave the place of battle splashed to the ears with mud and drenched with water; as to the garden itself, in parts it has changed into greasy pools, while in other places it is cracking with thirst.

KAREL CAPEK, 1890-1938

Mais Que Voulez-Vous?

The jolly men at Feckenham
Don't count their goods as common men,
Their heads are full of silly dreams
From half-past ten to half-past ten,
They'll tell you why the stars are bright,
And some sheep black and some sheep white . . .

These jolly men of Feckenham
One day when summer strode in power
Went down, it seems, among their lands
And saw their bean fields all in flower—
" Wheat-ricks," they said, " be good to see ;
What would a rick of blossoms be? "

So straight they brought the sickles out
And worked all day till day was done,
And builded them a good square rick
Of scented bloom beneath the sun.
And was not this I tell to you
A fiery-hearted thing to do?

JOHN DRINKWATER, 1882–1937

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LILI MARIE

"One man or ten," I asked, "what's the difference?"

by VEREEN BELL

I DIDN'T see it at first. Cueball and I were in the cabin of the boat playing poker, and when Joe and Bull started yelling I had just shoved into the pot all the money I'd saved to spend on that girl.

I'm not a professional gambler, but sometimes I think I ought to be, with my luck. I get into bad jams, but somehow I always get out. I believe I must have one of those guardian angels looking after me. And I'm not talking about cards when I say that. You'll see what I mean.

But my card luck was good, too; and Cueball wasn't playing very cleverly. At least, I thought he wasn't. So when he bet heavily against my pair of kings, I came right back, and that's how I lost the money I had brought from Havana.

Cueball was stuffing it into his pocket when Joe stuck his head into the cabin.

The colour of Joe's face gave me such a shock I forgot about everything for a second; I even forgot about that girl. His face was dead white, even his eyes looked white, and the top of my head almost crawled, because anything bad enough to scare Joe is mighty bad. Even when we were sixteen year old boys, diving after turtles for six cents a pound, I never saw anyone with more courage than Joe Adalin.

Then I saw the waterspout, and I didn't have to ask questions. She was a buster, that spout, I remember now, glancing out of the window while I was behaving indifferently about my cards, and seeing this thing hanging down out of the clouds like a bubble, but I thought nothing about it then.

It was a hot June day, very sultry, with the water dead calm. I suppose that spout was six miles away from us when we first saw it. We changed course, and the spout changed course, too. When I think back on it, I know there wasn't anything in the world that could have stopped us getting hit by that spout. It was just meant for us. Or perhaps I should say for me . . .

You see, I was on that boat because I was going back to Key West to that girl, going back against my common sense.

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She was in the quayside bar when I first saw her, with a sailor. I remember he was a good looking sailor, too, big and dark, the way women like them. I was having a beer, and when I looked round I saw she had her eye on me, just watching me. She looked about twenty two, only then the sailor said something and she laughed, and I thought, no, she's about eighteen.

The way she looked at me, she wasn't fresh at all, but, somehow, trying to work out if she had seen me before. But that didn't fool me. I knew she was ready to swap the sailor for me, and that made me feel good, because, to tell the truth, I had never before had a girl excite me just by looking at me.

I'll show you how slick she was. I was sitting there, wondering if I was going to steal her from that sailor without having to fight him. And then, without fuss or stir, she got up, walked to the bar with her glass, and stood right beside me.

"I would like some water, Raymond," she said, not looking at me. She talked funnily, not like an American, or a Cuban either, and later I found out she was French. She called him "Waymond."

I knew I had got my cue to make a move, so I said, "Doubt if they got water in here."

She came right out with it. "In thirty minutes I will be back alone," she said, taking the glass from Raymond.

Before long she left with her sailor, not looking at me. "Who's that?" I asked Raymond.

"She calls herself Lili Marie," he said.

After a while she came back in, by herself, sure enough. I liked the way she never behaved kittenishly, just came straight across and sat down by me.

"Are you a mechanic?" she asked.

"I'm a fisherman."

"You look like a mechanic I knew."

"How about a drink?"

She took a Coca Cola, and we began to get acquainted. I don't know when I ever talked so much about myself. This girl kept asking me questions, not nosylike, but as if she just had to know everything about me; and that shows you how slick she was, too, because that way a man begins to get the idea she thinks he's wonderful.

We stayed there a while, then went out. It was Saturday afternoon, and the boys were hanging round in regiments, looking for some excitement to get into, excitement with a female element. They all gave Lili the eye.

She didn't pay any attention. "You're the first boy I like in a long time," she told me.

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By now I was already going under the third time, but I still had sense enough to ask, " What about that sailor ? "

She shrugged. " Just somebody."

We did a lot of walking. Night came, and we stood by the breakwater and watched the little specks of phosphorescence drifting about, and once we saw a barracuda jump.

I suppose she thought I was a pretty slow number, because I hadn't tried to do more than hold her hand till now. She had me behaving in a way I'd never behaved before. I suppose you'd call it behaving like a gentleman.

I finally kissed her. " It's about time," she said.

" Let's go down to where I live," I said.

She looked at me, studying my face. She reached up and kissed me again, and said, " No."

It doesn't pay to start off behaving like a gentleman, because then they try to behave like ladies. Only, I didn't care. To tell the truth, I was glad she said no. That's when I should've known something had gone bad with me.

I'd been monkeying round the coast a lot, from Apalachee to Jacksonville. Joe Adalin and I used to work in a shark fishery, and we net fished, and for a while I was mate on one of those luxury hire yachts in Miami. In that sort of life, you're with women a lot, different ones, but mostly the same kind. I took that kind as they came. But when it came to getting serious, then I had other ideas.

The girl I wanted to take up housekeeping with was going to be first class, not the kind you steal from a sailor in a bar. I'd sworn that many a time, especially after seeing friends of mine marrying some gal I wouldn't use for crab bait, because they got caught when they just happened to be in the notion. I suppose you'd say I had ideals.

But it wasn't long before Lili Marie had me tacking to starboard, and all ideals just got shoved away. You know, there's something I've never understood : why is it poets are always talking about how happy love makes them, and how they want to dance round like young goats ? Love never did that to me. It made me sick. Honest, I'd wake up thinking about that girl, and wanting her so much I ached and my head pounded ; it was like a hangover.

One afternoon I borrowed a car. It wasn't much of a car, just an old trap, with holes in the wings where salt had eaten through. But it ran, and we drove up the coast road, past Pigeon Key. We stopped on the other side of the Seven-Mile Bridge, and we walked back and leaned on the concrete rail, looking at the water.

She stood there with the wind blowing her hair and holding

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her dress against her, watching the different colours in the water, where it changed from green on the reefs to blue in the channels. It was nice, seeing her enjoy it. I began to realize it was pretty too, as if I'd never seen water before.

She started to talk, about different things, softly at first, as if she was talking to herself. Then she came to the point.

"The reason I asked you if you were a mechanic," she said, "is because you resemble very much one I knew. Not in the way you look—I don't mean that. But something about you. I don't know what." She turned to me then and looked me straight in the eyes. "This mechanic, I married him when I was fifteen."

"You married when you were only fifteen?" I just couldn't believe it. I thought she was teasing.

"I knew he was the person for me. My parents, they did not think so. That was very bad, and I did not pay any attention. We ran away. We came to Florida. Then in a garage a car fell off one of those jacks. The axle broke his neck." She turned away, looking down at the water. "Then I was alone, just drifting."

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't say anything.

She said, "It does not matter any longer. That was four years ago. It doesn't hurt any more."

A bunch of mackerel came through, swimming under the bridge where the tide was running like a river. I kept watching them, but after a while I couldn't see anything; I was just looking, thinking about her.

I felt numb all over, half seasick, not wanting to do anything but stand there. And in my mind was the one thought: the girl I marry will be first class. Not the kind you steal from a sailor in a bar.

She slipped her arm through mine, and said, "What is it, Bill, that makes you look that way?"

"I got to go away," I answered.

"Where?"

It didn't make any difference where. I just had to go away. "Off somewhere," I said.

"When will you come back?"

"I'm not coming back."

"Bill, I never belonged to but one man."

"One man or ten, what's the difference?"

She stared at the water. A tarpon rolled, showing his flag, and leaving a little boil where his tail flicked under.

We walked back to the car. I could hardly feel my feet hitting the ground.

We got into the car, and she said, "Don't go away, Bill. Please don't" . . .

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I don't think I would have gone, by myself, that is. But as I said, there was Somebody on my side, looking out for me. I said it was a guardian angel, but, somehow, that sounds crazy and it doesn't exactly fit.

I remember once I had a long, hot streak at shooting craps. We never shot for much money, because we never had it to shoot, but this time I couldn't lose, and the boys said, "Willie, you got a lucky star." And that's the way I feel—I got a lucky star, only it's not exactly a star, it's more like Somebody watching out for me.

Anyway, Joe Adalin came to Key West, and he was taking his boat to Havana, and I ran into him down at the dock as he was getting his boat all filled up.

"You better go with me," he said.

"When you coming back?" I asked him.

"I'm not coming back."

"Then I'll damn' sure go," I said.

That's how I ended up in Havana. We got a room, and Joe bought a secondhand radio. He worked his boat, fishing and stuff. But I didn't want fishing, I wanted a fast, hard job. Fishing is hard work, but there are times when you take it easy and I knew I would start thinking, and I knew I'd go crazy if I had time to think.

I got a job with a demolition gang, tearing down an old hotel. At first they wanted me to clean bricks, but I wasn't going to just sit there and knock cement off bricks and think about that girl. So I got other jobs, building scaffolding, and tearing out the old timbers with drills. I got along pretty well, too; only, when we stopped to eat, I usually got a bad sinking spell. I just sat there thinking about her, wishing she was the kind of girl I'd always wanted. What I ate tasted like old rags and snapper line.

I hope it wasn't my lucky star that made that fellow fall off the scaffold. It never killed him, but it broke him up like a bunch of sticks; I remember him lying in that mess of twisted tin and old bricks and burnt timber, and his drill hanging down by the hose with the trigger locked, still barking away, twisting and jumping like a frog on a string.

After they had taken him away, the foreman came to me and looked at my heft and said, "Why don't you give it a try?" And I did.

It was wonderful, fighting that crazy thing. There wasn't time to think of any girl, not with that thing pounding you. At night, when you got the brick dust off you and piled into bed, you were dead.

But the Sundays, they were the hardest. I tried getting drunk,

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only everything got drunk but my brain. I could hardly walk, but my brain still ran wild, loving that girl. I tried the whisky escape only once.

Here's a funny thing, though: I was saving my money. I told myself I was saving up to go on a buster. But all the time I knew that money was to get me back to Key West.

The way things turned out, I didn't need it for that.

Joe came in one day and said, "I'm going home. Cueball Manly's in town, and he says the Hedell Fish Company's been wanting me to take one of their boats. I don't suppose you want to go."

"I'm staying here," I said.

But about ten minutes before Joe was to leave, I found myself throwing my stuff into my sea chest, and breathing nearly as fast as that drill. Now, it oughtn't to be hard to get down to the pier from where I stayed, but you never saw so many things happen to a man in your life. All the powers of my lucky star seemed to be trying to keep me from getting back to that girl.

I caught a taxi, and the engine gave up after one block. I got out and ran, and bumped into some tough character who got mad and began hitting me, and wouldn't let me go until I knocked him into the middle of next week. Everything happened, but, to tell the truth, I wasn't going to be stopped, not by a lucky star or anything else.

I jumped on board just as Cueball threw the lines off. Joe didn't say a word, he just grinned at me and punched the throttle open. By the time we'd cleared the harbour I felt sick.

All that big talk about the kind of girl I wanted to marry came back. But it did no good. I was on my way back to Lili—and I was happy. But that lucky star had other plans. That lucky star sent the waterspout . . .

When you see a waterspout, most of the time all you have to do is head off away from it. But this one, we couldn't get away from. We turned east, and the spout turned east. We turned west, and it turned west. Finally we turned completely round south, and she began making a wide circle, writhing and twisting, but coming straight on as if to head us off.

It wasn't more than a mile from us now, and we could hear it. It kept getting closer, and we could feel the suck of it. Cueball's cap jumped off his head and sailed out into it. I'm not sure what happened after that.

I remember Cueball brought up the lifebelts, but I didn't want anything that would keep me on the top of the water where that spout could get me. I suppose we were all yelling at each

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other because there was a lot of noise. The awning, lashed with strong snapper line, was sucked off, just snatched away.

I saw she was ready to hit, and over I went. I dived just as deep as I could, and tried to swim on down. But the water was running uphill, trying to jump up into the air, twisting me and tossing me until I couldn't think. All I could do was keep fighting down.

Then it was all over. The spout broke, and the water fell in bucketfuls. I saw the boat, away off, floating on its side. Some of the men had crawled up on to it, and I could just make them out, hanging on to it like ragmen.

I yelled, but they were too near gone to hear me, and I don't know what they could have done anyway. The boat was drifting away from me. I started swimming towards it. I had shooting pains in my shoulders. My arms felt as though they'd been twisted.

The sea was quiet now, and the sun burning down again. I kept swimming, not getting anywhere. Then something drifted in front of me—a lifebelt. I crawled into it, and rested a minute. Then I started paddling again.

But I couldn't make headway. Finally I saw I couldn't catch the boat unless I got out of the lifebelt; and if I turned it loose, I might not be able to swim that far. So there wasn't anything to do but stay.

All afternoon I just floated. The sun kept boiling, and I could feel the salt dried on my face. The water stayed calm. Once a tiger shark came by, his fin just easing through the water, and even his tail fin showing, but he ran when I made a stir. I began to get thirsty.

Late that afternoon I spotted the island. It couldn't have been more than a mile away, or I couldn't have seen it, low down in the water as I was. I knew then that the Keys weren't far away, and that made me feel better. Even then I thought about that girl, over there in Key West.

I began kicking, working towards the island. The tide must have been at ebb, because I could see I was getting closer.

Night came, and I was still getting closer. The moon rose, bright shining, and the phosphorescent worms began floating round, like little stars that had fallen into the water. Two more hours went by, and I knew I should have already made the island.

Then I realized the tide had turned. I wasn't more than a hundred yards out, but I just couldn't seem to get closer, not as long as I wore that lifebelt.

So I let it go, and then I lay flat on the water, kicking, and

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moving my arms as much as I could; and I began getting closer again. But I was dead tired, and that tide was very strong. I don't remember what I was thinking, but I finally decided to give up. My feet sunk, only they didn't go all the way down, because they hit bottom.

For a long time I couldn't move. I just stood there up to my neck, resting. Then I waded on in to the shore, and crawled up out of the water, and fell on the beach.

The mosquitoes found me immediately. I was too tired to even try to fan them off, but before long the tide wind got stronger, and they left.

I heard something moving, something sort of scraping on the sand. Like somebody dragging a log along the beach. I didn't move. I just lay there listening. It kept getting closer, and finally I looked up, and saw a big loggerhead turtle crawling towards me. She was heading for the water.

This was a big one, three or four hundred pounds. She could have bitten a two-by-four in two with one snap of her jaws, and I was right between her and where she was going. But I couldn't move. To tell the truth, I was thinking about that girl and, in my present frame of mind, I didn't much care whether that loggerhead bit my face off or not. But finally she saw me, made a detour, and slid out into the water.

I'd read a lot of stuff about desert islands, and what fine places they are. I'd read about the palm trees everywhere, and the blue bathing pools, and the pretty girls. But this wasn't one of them. There were no trees except a couple of scrub palms, and there were no pretty girls. Unless you count the one I was carrying round in my mind.

And there was no fresh water. I went looking the next morning, knowing all the time I wouldn't find any. The island was hardly big enough to mention, ten acres probably.

By the time the sun came up, my throat was like sandpaper. All the salt water that had got into my mouth the night before hadn't done me any good, and when it got warmer I began to think I'd go stark crazy for water. But there wasn't a drop of fresh water on the island. I even dug in the ground with my hands, knowing it wouldn't do any good.

My tongue felt like a tennis ball in my mouth. Once I convinced myself there was nothing I could do, I had enough sense to sit under one of those palms.

So I just sat, watching the ocean. It looked good enough to drink. I'd see it curling, and beading on the sand, and think, Now, wouldn't a little sip of that be good? But I knew that would

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finish me ; I'd go clean out of my head, with cramp, and be thirstier than ever.

About the middle of the day a steamer came by, 'way out, heading for Florida. In books they build fires, or climb up big trees and wave a shirt, and the boat stops and picks the hero up. But how was I going to build a fire ? And where were the big trees ? I did run up and down the beach waving my shirt. I did that for an hour, knowing all the time they couldn't see me.

Finally it was gone, and I came back to the palm tree. The funny thing was, when I was praying for that boat to see me, I wasn't thinking about the drinking water that was on it, nor about being rescued ; I was thinking about the girl. I was thinking, That boat will take me to her.

I didn't remember anything for a while after that, except that I was hot with fever. So hot I thought I'd burn to charcoal.

Then I dreamed I heard voices, and down on the beach a boat had pulled up, and it was Joe Adalin, and Cueball, and Bull. They had come back for me. The girl was in the boat, too.

" Come on, Willie," they said ; " we've come for you."

" Well," I said, " you were a hell of a time getting here."

" Come on, Willie," they said.

Then I sat up, and there wasn't anyone there, only a pelican sitting in the water.

After a while, on the other side of the island, a fisherman's boat pulled up, and they put the skiffs out, and began rowing in a circle, letting the seine out to make a strike. They were after cigar minnows for snapper bait, I guessed.

I walked down the beach and said, " How's for luck ?" And they said they just started.

I said, " I don't suppose you expected to find a man here." No, they said, they sure didn't.

" Where you going ? " I asked.

" We're going out on to the banks. Don't you want to go ? "

" No," I said ; " I think I'll wait around and catch a boat that's going to Key West."

Then I sat up again ; and I wasn't down on the beach, and there hadn't been any fishermen.

Some time later I remembered that turtle. I ran down the island to where I'd seen that old loggerhead, and I began digging round in the sand with my hands like a dog until I found the eggs. Turtle eggs are soft, and you don't crack them open like hen eggs. I put one in my mouth and bust it like a grape. I reckon I must have eaten a dozen or so, and I felt better, my throat wasn't so dry.

I kept watching for boats, but none came by. A large bird kept

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sailing round in the sky, waiting for the pelican to find something worth stealing. I don't know when night came, but it did. After a while the moon rose, and I heard a sound. At first I thought it was a boat grounding on the beach, but then I knew better. A turtle came out on the beach, pulling herself along on her flippers.

I kept watching her, trying to get hold of this idea that was hanging round just outside my brain. Finally she finished her job of laying and went back into the water, and when I saw her swimming off, the idea came clearly to me—too late.

When I realized I was too late I cried just like a girl. Only there were no tears. I didn't have enough water left in me to cry a tear.

But I went down on the beach and kept waiting. A short way out, some porpoises got into a mullet run, and I could hear their big flukes churning the water, *pom-pom-pom*. I suppose I slept a while, then, if you call it sleeping. When I awoke, there was another turtle on the beach.

I jumped up and ran down to her, and she started dragging herself towards the water. I got too close to her mouth, and her jaws chopped shut, just missing my arm. I got round to the side, and gave a big heave and turned her over, her big flippers waving in the air.

Next morning I got a rock and knocked off all the barnacles on her back I could get to, and blunted the big spurs on her hind flippers. I got new strength just from the excitement of the idea. I watched the water all the time.

A lot of boats came by, all heading for that girl at Key West, but I knew they weren't any use. They were too close, a useful one would be further out. I kept watching to the south, where the boats from Cuba would come.

That's how I almost missed the south-bound one. It was a big fishing boat, heading for Cuba. I'll tell you how crazy I was, I just cussed and cussed. I didn't want to go to Cuba, I wanted to go to Key West. Then I came to my senses a little, and told myself I couldn't live another day without water.

I saw then that the lucky star had won. There was no way I could get to that girl, the lucky star was seeing to that. I could either stay on the island and perish, or I could try to reach that boat, Cuba-bound. Once in Cuba, something else would happen to keep me from Key West. Oh, I could see it clear as daylight. I was beaten. So I gave up. I'd never see that girl again.

I studied the boat a minute, and saw that I'd be lucky to head her off. I didn't much care whether I did or not, to tell the truth. I manned the turtle over right side up, and she headed straight for

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the ocean, madder than hell. I followed her out into the water.

Soon as the water got deep enough, she started under, and that's when I got up on top of her. I got my hands on the front of the shell, right back of her leathery neck, and pulled up, so she couldn't sound. It was hard work, holding her up, and I know I couldn't have done it, sick as I was, if I hadn't been half crazy.

I began thinking I was a boy again, and Joe Adalin and I were diving after turtles for the meat. I remember Joe used to play a trick on me; I'd dive for a turtle, and I'd swim him towards the boat for Joe to throw me a line, and Joe would pull away from me in the boat and make me follow him. Then he'd stop and say, "Right; come on," and just before I got there he'd start up again.

The way it works, the turtle can't go down as long as you keep rearing back, pulling up. He'll just go swimming right on top. Most of the power's in the front flippers, and if you want to turn to the right, you hold the right hind flipper, and round to the right the turtle will go.

Only today I couldn't hold this turtle up, weak as I was. I don't remember it very clearly, but sometimes I would feel the water in my ears, and I would think, "Hell, I've let her go under again," and I'd rear back, nearly busting a gusset to get her up again.

It's a good thing sea turtles can't turn their heads round like land turtles, because the old sow was furious. When we'd get back on the top, I'd hear her jaws wham shut.

Every now and then I got a glimpse of the boat, and I knew I was getting closer. Then sometimes I'd lose it, and I'd know we had turned round, and I'd hold a hind flipper until we were headed straight again.

The barnacles right on top of her back, those I hadn't been able to get to with the rock, were cutting me, and I thought I must be bleeding. I just hoped there weren't any sharks or barracudas around to get a whiff of that blood.

Then for a long time I lost sight of the boat, and when I found her again she looked smaller, and I thought, I've missed it! Then I got another good look, and the reason it looked smaller was because she'd seen me, and had changed her course towards me. What I saw was a head-on view.

Now, this is something I've never been able to work out, whether my lucky star had a change of heart, or what. Perhaps he was teasing me, as Joe used to do with the boat, or perhaps he was just trying to show me that when you feel like I did about a girl, some things don't matter as much as you think. Anyway, I know I have a lucky star, and when it comes to getting me out of jams and fixing things up right, he sure knows his business.

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The reason I say that is because of what happened after they pulled me on to the boat. I remember they gave me a little water, and I asked them where they were heading, and they said Cuba, and what difference did it make to me as long as I'd got picked up? After that the whole thing is a blank.

The first thing I remember after that is the skipper coming in. I felt that the boat wasn't moving and was listing a little to port, and the engine was quiet.

"Well, this is as far as we go," he said, as if he were thinking about something else. "You better see a doctor, and take it easy for a while."

A salt water man never feels right in a boat that's hanging off to one side, so I said, first thing, "What's the matter with this boat?"

He didn't answer me directly, it was more as if he were talking to himself: "It wasn't supposed to be there. Perhaps I misfigured. But I'll be damned if I ever knew about any reef where we were!"

For a minute after he went out I lay there, puzzling, and then I rose up on my elbows and looked out of the porthole, and it wasn't Havana, it was Key West. And finally it came to me what the captain was talking about. He'd hit a reef and had had to turn back!

I didn't go to a doctor. I went right to Lili Marie. When she saw me she looked at me as though she could hardly believe it. Then she came straight to me.

"I thought I'd not ever see you again," she said.

I held her tight, not feeling sick or weak, but feeling fine, with her warm against me, knowing for good and all that right there was where I belonged.

* * *

THE PHOENIX

Deep in the study
Of eugenics
We find that fabled
Fowl, the Phoenix.
The wisest bird
As ever was,
Rejecting other
Mas and Pas,
It lays one egg,
Not ten or twelve,
And when it's hatched,
Out pops itselve.

OGDEN NASH, *Good Intentions*

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DEATH AND MR. MALLETT

Somewhere — he could not remember — he had seen that face before

by STEVEN BRACHER

MR. MALLETT lived in a cottage under a great sycamore tree on the edge of the village. He lived alone with Mrs. Mallett, for their children had grown up and gone away. Always against the tree in a large shed at the side of the cottage could be heard someone sawing and hammering. This was Mr. Mallett, who was the carpenter and undertaker of the village. Nobody in the village could remember a time when every coffin that went to the churchyard was not made by Mr. Mallett.

Mr. Mallett did not possess a dog. A cat, however, chose to live with him, and would occasionally permit Mrs. Mallett to stroke its back. Mr. Mallett took no notice at all of the cat, but whenever he made a coffin, the animal would sit with him and watch. It took no interest, however, in his other work, and then its habit was to sit on a large flat slab of stone by a little path in the churchyard and watch for the Vicar. When the Vicar passed by, which was quite often as the little path led from the vicarage to the vestry, the cat watched him until he was out of sight. Once the Vicar tried to stroke the cat, but was scratched severely.

Below the great sycamore tree the ground dropped steeply through cherry orchards to meadows below, and on a summer evening one or other of the neighbours would sit under the tree and watch men at the haymaking all across the Vale. If there was a coffin in the workshop, Mr. Mallett would invite him in to look at it.

In the cottage under the sycamore tree they lived contentedly: Mr. Mallett, Mrs. Mallett, and the cat which was as contented as its nature allowed. And if year by year time left its traces upon them, neither saw it in the other, nor in themselves.

It was at that season of the year when the sunset glow still lies at midnight in the northern sky, and through the short night the darkness lies lightly upon the summer fields, that Mr. Mallett was awakened early one morning by the cuckoo calling and calling away, calling faintly and more faintly, across the churchyard, and

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through Picket Piece and Mr. Barton's Ten-Acre, to the cherry orchards at Dean Farm. In the silence, he heard then many things: the twittering of the martins under the eaves, partridges calling in the hayfield behind the cottage, a stirring in the sycamore leaves, a scratching in the thatch, the distant crowing of a cock, and the bark of a farm dog far out in the Vale.

As he lay, he became aware that Mrs. Mallett was already awake; and after a moment she said in a gentle voice that she did not think she would get up that morning. She would just lie in bed and have a good cup of tea. Mr. Mallett listened, but she said nothing more. Such a thing had never happened before. Mr. Mallett went quietly downstairs, and brought his wife some good strong tea.

Afterwards he did not go into his workshop, but stayed about the house. Towards midday Mrs. Mallett said she thought she would sleep a little, and turned in the bed, where she had lain very still all morning, so that she could see the light and shade of the great tree that moved softly upon the windowpanes.

She slept so soundly then that Mr. Mallett never knew when it was she died.

When at last he saw that it was so, he went very slowly down into the village; on his return he sat for a while under the tree. Then he went into his workshop; that cat was sitting in the doorway, and had to move very quickly, for Mr. Mallett did not seem to see him. He began, thumbling and rather clumsily, to turn over his stock of boards.

She was never one to give trouble, was Mrs. Mallett.

After this, Mr. Mallett was rather more silent than before, and moved more slowly, and often in his workshop he would break off, the tools in his hands, and stare at nothing for ten minutes together. The cat saw nothing odd in this, being itself used to doing nothing for much longer periods. The village saw, and said nothing, being used to such matters as birth and death and the passage of the years. The tree murmured in all its leaves, but none knew what it said.

Soon the first frosts came, and the beeches flamed along the hillsides, and morning and evening there was a smell of wood-smoke in the air, until on a day of still, frosty, blue skies the great tree stood bare and leafless, and winter lay upon the Vale.

All winter Mr. Mallett worked in his shed beside the cottage, until the first soft days of February, and the first primroses. Then day by day a spring breeze came drifting from the south, and a green mist lay upon the woods, and the cuckoo came back to the

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Vale, and the orchards stood in blossom. The martins returned to their nests under the eaves of the cottage, and one morning very softly the sycamore began to rustle again, and Mr. Mallett saw that the light and shadow of its leaves lay again on his window. All about Mr. Mallett the summer deepened.

It was towards evening, on a day in July, that a thunderstorm built up over the Vale. It seemed a long time to Mr. Mallett since anyone had died in the village; he looked sadly at some beautiful slabs of elm and oak lying in his workshop, and in his mind he made with them that perfect and resplendent thing that was so often in his thoughts and always seemed a little better, try as he would, than each coffin that he made. The storm built up until it stood in a great dark thunderhead above the sycamore. The tree was very still.

Mr. Mallett looked out at the doorway, and it seemed to him that the cloud was like a bowed and sorrowful figure, gigantic above the tree.

He turned back into his workshop, that now was almost dark, and as he did so a jagged line of lightning seemed to split the cloud. Mr. Mallett waited for the thunder, and then, as the first raindrops began to beat hesitantly upon the roof, he heard someone walking up the path. Mr. Mallett turned back to the doorway, and the cat ran past him crouching and hid behind the timber at the back of the shed.

The sun was setting, and low in the west, beneath and beyond the storm, some lurid bars of light still lingered. Mr. Mallett bade the visitor good evening and stood aside for him to come in from the rain; and then he fell silent, for he saw now that this was one whom he had known well all his life. It was a face of which it was difficult to judge the age. It had had beauty, and still was beautiful. Yet there was that in it which told that the man was young no longer, but very old and very tired.

"I have come," said the stranger, "to ask that you will make me a coffin. It is for my own use, and I know well that to each coffin that you make you add something which is to be found in none other."

Mr. Mallett could not remember how or where he had known this man so well. In his mind it seemed to have to do with his coffin-making, and then again it seemed to him a face that he had known and loved when he was very young—he thought of his father, but his father had been a very different looking man.

Mr. Mallett showed the stranger his best woods, and most beautiful brass handles, and all the time the unanswered question

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was knocking at his brain. He thought at last that perhaps this was one of the proud city undertakers who had heard of his skill, and Mr. Mallett was sorry that the man had been wrongly informed, knowing well there was nothing in his coffins but elm and oak and brass, and a little padding. He thought, perhaps, he had met him at the Undertakers' Outing to Weymouth in the year '07. At last he asked him if, in fact, he were of the trade.

The stranger was silent for a moment. Then he said, " Yes. I am an undertaker; perhaps the greatest of them. For that which I undertake none other could accomplish, and there is not a firm in the trade in which I am not a partner; indeed, the senior partner and the most active, although human nature being what it is, I am commonly regarded as a sleeping partner only. But I have come," said he, " to see that the rest to which I have borne so many is a desirable thing, desirable even to me who can remember more clearly than most men how the stars sang together when the world was young. I have come very greatly to desire that sleep in the quiet earth that was given to men as the last and sufficient reward for all their sufferings.

" Indeed, I am old now, and tired, and it is only a sadness to me to see how each spring the earth strives imperfectly to recall that golden age in the clear morning of the world. And so I am come to you, as one well known in the trade perhaps beyond your knowing."

Then Mr. Mallett was silent, for he understood very well this man's desires, that were also his own.

When Mr. Mallett was again alone, he seemed happier than he had been for a long time past, and began at once turning over his store of timber, and choosing the best pieces. The cat crept back into the doorway, and sat and watched him as he worked. Through the window of the shed, out of the cool green dusk, came the smell of his garden after the rain. Mr. Mallett thought with pleasure of his customer. He had thought he was quite a young man until he saw into his eyes. He liked, also, his manner of speaking, which was thoughtful and leisurely, as of a man who knows he has all the time he needs, and reminded Mr. Mallett dimly of the lessons that were read in church on a Sunday, only he thought his customer would read lessons much better than the Vicar, who took them all on one note.

They had talked for a long time, though Mr. Mallett scarcely knew now of what, but it seemed to him that the stranger had the most pleasing voice he had ever heard, as comforting as warm water to the skin. And, thinking of that voice, it seemed to Mr. Mallett suddenly, as sometimes the scent of apple blossom came to him

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in spring through the window of his shed, that he was again young Ernie Mallett who lived in the wheel-wright's cottage by the church, above a Vale that was wider and richer than that he now knew, and bounded by higher and more verdant hills, and who sang in the choir, and married young Bessie Cheeseman, and set up in the carpentering in the cottage under the sycamore, seeing then his life extend before him like an endless and sunlit plain.

The next day, in the shed by the side of the cottage, the cat sat and watched Mr. Mallett. Mr. Mallett was working on the coffin, and as he worked he hummed happily to himself, for it seemed to him more and more that this was going to be the perfect thing that he had always dreamed of making. Mr. Mallett was old, and lately he had felt tired, and he had begun to believe that his eye was not as good as it once had been ; he feared, with each coffin that he made, that it was not as good even as those he had made before. But now his hands and the tools they held moved faultlessly, and he saw with delight how his work grew. The village heard him at work and knew the sounds, and wondered, for none had died there.

His customer had named a day when he would come again, and when the coffin should be finished, and as the day approached, Mr. Mallett began to fear that he would not finish it in time. On the preceding day it still lacked the handles and the lid, and the oiling and polishing of the wood. He worked late that day in his little workshop, and when at last he left it evening had come over the Vale, over that far familiar landscape below the branches of the old tree.

Mr. Mallett could not remember a time when that great and sunlit plain had not been at his elbow as he worked, and close beside him in all he did. He looked at it now in a friendly way, and gave it a nod as he went into the cottage.

His friends who came that night to the old tree, as the sky faded and the moon rose and the lights came out in the Vale, looked long and silently at every part of the coffin, and said at last that he would never make a better, and had never made as good. Mr. Mallett felt then that they spoke the truth : he said very little, but looked happily at the coffin that he had made.

In the morning, it still remained to polish it. Mr. Mallett rose early, and went, more happily than he could ever remember, into his shed and began his work. Long after its surface seemed perfect he worked upon it, intent that to the last minute of his time the beautiful thing should be rendered more complete.

As the clock struck noon in the kitchen, he heard the footsteps

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of his customer upon the path; he did not turn at once, for he had seen one little spot in a corner of the wood where there seemed the slightest dullness. Mr. Mallett leaned forward, with the happiness of perfect achievement burning in his heart, and polished it away.

His visitor stood now in the doorway, his shadow across the floor, and behind him the sunlit Vale. He called softly, in a pleasant voice, to Mr. Mallett.

But Mr. Mallett did not answer.

The man in the doorway did not call again. For a moment, as he looked at him, there was envy and a great weariness in his eyes. Then he turned and went down under the branches of the great tree, towards the farms and the spires and the little copses of the Vale.

* * *

IN PRAISE OF GREEN

Glory be to God for Green—
Indestructible and clean;
Symbol of eternal spring,
Hope and love awakening.
First buds charming tired eyes—
Green's the essence of surprise.
Flash of ice and emerald's fire—
Green's the emblem of desire.

Dark and glowing holly-green;
Vivid, dancing, jolly green,
Fresh as when the world began:
Nature's sweetest gift to man.

Opalescent summer seas;
Dreaming hills and hazy leas;
Orchids rare and peacocks' plumes;
Stars green-glinting, forest glooms,
Ferny tracks through sombre pines,
Ancient ivy, flower-starred vines.
Those who shun this blessed hue,
Should for Nature's pardon sue.

I will sing a hymn of praise
And thanksgiving, all my days.
Green is Life! and when I'm dead,
Green be grass above my head.

ANTONIA SAXON

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LAST CHUKKER

Sunshine and galloping hooves, dust and high endeavour! What more could any man want in life—or to remember?

by J. K. STANFORD

OLD JAMES GAYNER, jogging up the riverbank on that dark winter morning, knew beyond doubt that they meant to kill him. He had got away with it for so many years unsuspected, but there was no hope now. As an ex-police officer, with forty years' experience of what had once been, before it was separated, the most criminal province in India, he found himself wondering, with a curiously detached interest, how they would accomplish it. The Burmese in such a mood were fairly direct. They used a knife or a bludgeon or a spear. But the Chinese had so many ingenious ways, from arsenic down to the worst of the lot, that tiny horsehair-like fragment of bamboo which, once inside you, set up the acutest irritation until you died.

Banksome of the Excise, he remembered, had gone that way down in the delta, in a two year long agony which had puzzled all the doctors in Rangoon. They had talked vaguely of "sprue" and enteritis, and tried every diet that was known to them. Only Gayner had divined the truth after the poor fellow's death, from a hint dropped by an old Burmese headman.

"He knew too much," the old man had whispered; "all the Chinese smugglers, and the licensees of every drinkshop in Pyàpon had been scared of him for years."

Anyhow, thought Gayner with his usual decision, they won't try that with *me*. It was far too slow!

He jogged on towards the teak forest, an immensely tall scraggy bearded figure, one eye on the path and one on the new day coming swiftly behind the plum-dark mountains forty miles away where Burma marched with Yunnan. He must get home, he thought, before it was really light. He reckoned he had two more hours, at most, in which to make a plan. Alone, and living in the bazaar, his enemies would have it pretty well their own way. Well, he must just trust his luck! It had stuck to him for over sixty years, though nobody in Myitkabà would ever think him one of the lucky ones, a decayed ex-policeman, an outcast from his own kind.

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Gayner was clear of the thick bush jungle now, and in the scattered teak trees which ran up to the edge of the town. He was tired and empty, but the keen eyes, with the deep wrinkles at their corners, under his old hat and shaggy brows, had time to note a blur of white moving down over the leaden water of the great river. That, he guessed, was a trip of goosanders which were flying to their morning fishing grounds.

In all Gayner's years of service, and afterwards as well, the pageant of the Irrawaddy river, that noble highway of old Burma, had never failed to cheer him. It meant space and peace, coolness and cleanliness and colour, a shining world without end. If only now he could get into his little punt and set himself adrift down that mighty river, down a defile and past Bhamo and the Shweli, down to the little sacred pagoda dotted hills of Sagaing which looked towards the Ava shore and Mandalay, down through the hot radiance of the dry zone, with the smell of the pea fields coming off the islands, down and down with the river!

Ah! what a journey that would be, with only fishermen and terns and eagles to watch him go, down at last to the great sandheads where a million birds piped and cried along the sea fringe where no man came, out to the open sea. That would be an end, he felt, if ever there was one! He sighed. It could not be done. There were things he had to finish today, even if today were the last day of all for him. He must not back out now.

Thirty yards further on, a new-cut branch lay across the narrow path. He stepped round it and, as he slowed up, there was a faint hiss on his right from behind a tree, and something grazed his neck and "plocked" faintly into another tree. Gayner had never been at the business end of a blow-pipe before, but he had often seen them used when collecting birds in the hills, and he was familiar with the sound. He knew, too, how quickly the poison on those darts could spread, if it got under the skin, though the Lisus of the eastern hills when they shot a bird, would cut it out quickly, and eat the rest without a qualm. He leapt into the bushes, but his attacker had vanished like a dream. He heard a rustle a hundred yards away, a rattle of sand and tiny stones as someone slid down the bank of the river, and then silence. Whoever it was had gone, beyond pursuing.

Once back on the path, Gayner quickened his pace for home. The attack meant that they had spotted him, as he had imagined they would, leaving the scene of that conversation which he had so providentially overheard. He must get home at once and think things out. Even in that moment his brain worked coolly. The Chinese were certainly devilish quick off the mark! Someone in that party he had seen must have cut across to the railway line and

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come in by the early train from Pyindaung, and guessed accurately by which path James Gayner would return.

The old thatched bungalow lay in a squalid outpost of the bazaar. A lamp was standing on the table and there was a light in the kitchen. "*Hpalap, Maràn Gam!*" he called. A tousled Kachin in a white turban and a black silk coat brought him tea. Gayner lit a cigarette and sat down in an old armchair to think.

A man less alive to realities might have thought of asking help from the district officials. The murder of a European, even such a semi-outcast as himself, was not a thing to be passed over lightly if it occcurred. But Gayner had lived too long alone, and he knew that he was officially in disgrace. An old policeman who had just escaped dismissal fifteen years before, who lived by himself in the native quarter, whom all the officials looked down on as an opium addict, an old man without friends and with little money, who was unknown outside the station except as a naturalist . . . how could he possibly go to authority with his fantastic tale and demand protection?

He knew, too, that for the moment all the Europeans in the station were deeply engrossed in the petty social whirl of their "October Week," an annual festival of polo and tennis, parties and dinners, which made up to them, once a year, for their lives of heat and exile. Any serious work for the next two days would have to wait. Even Gayner himself, the outcast, was playing in the polo final that afternoon. He smiled grimly. The Chinese would probably never let him reach the ground.

He heard the sound of water being poured into his bath.

He called his servant again. "I sleep now, Maràn Gam. No one is to enter the house at all. Do you understand?"

"I understand, *duwa*."

"And clean my polo-boots very specially today." If they let him get as far as the polo-ground that afternoon, they should see what a pair of really well kept boots looked like!

And suddenly Gayner thought, Boots! He grinned. What a farce to be worrying about what his old boots would look like, when he probably would not survive to put them on! The weird little details which absorbed a man in his most anxious moments!

Gayner slipped off his sodden khaki clothes, bathed, and put on a vest and a ragged pair of black Shan trousers. Then he lay down on his bent camp-cot.

He lit another cigarette. It was the first time for seven hours that he could think over quietly what he had seen and heard. Had he really seen those campfires with the line of tethered mules near them in that remote corner of the Pyindaung game-sanctuary

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where few men came? Had he really seen those three faces of the men huddled round the biggest fire of all, well out of earshot of the muleteers? Had he really heard those words?

The hunting of man had always thrilled him in his police days. But now, to run into one's quarry like this when you had gone out for a quiet stroll to watch birds and take your mind off the ordeal of tomorrow's game of polo, was like chopping a fox, when you thought he was miles away! And what a fox it was, this time. Here was proof of all he had been guessing at for years, and behind it something much bigger, much more dangerous! This would make even the M.I. people sit up at last, in their retreat in Maymyo.

Always, to Gayner, the great moments of his life had come, as it were, accidentally. So rarely had he expected them, especially the discoveries he had made about birds. And now he found himself thinking. What a fluke, what a very great fluke to tie up both ends of a tangle like that! So often, before his downfall when they had retired him on a " compassionate " pension, he had revelled as a policeman in the links of any chain of evidence. Often, too often, you had nothing to go on but the beginning of the chain, and could only guess its end. More often you got the first and a few succeeding links, but the far end, the end that really mattered, was down in the mud and the darkness where you would never see it. But once in a while, and all too rarely, the anchor-end of the chain came up, perhaps with a few links still hidden, but with something fat and surprising on its slimy hooks.

This time, for a wonder, the whole of his chain was in view. He had known enough for years about the fat contractor Lim Hsung. He ran a drinkshop and an opium-den, as well as hiring out several hundred mules to the officials in the station, but he had quarrelled with the Chinese in Tengyueh long years before and did not dare to show his nose in Yunnan. Hired mules with him were really a sideline. They gave him a pull with Government officers, and a grand opportunity to smuggle opium.

The second link in the chain Gayner had guessed at often but had never seen. This was the flash Zerbuddi, as the Burmese Mohammedans were called, who was a senior clerk in the deputy commissioner's office at Mandalay. He probably worked the intelligence side of the opium racket and a lot of the transport through underlings lower down. But the Japanese masseur from Rangoon . . . ! Nobody could ever have guessed, thought Gayner, that a man like that was at the bottom end of the chain. A man who advertised in all the English newspapers, who treated every athlete in Rangoon for sprains and injuries; who worked, unbeknown to the Turf Club, on half the racehorses for tendon-trouble.

But there they had been, all three of them, round that fire.

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Only a crisis could have brought them together, well over seven hundred miles from Rangoon, in this remote jungle.

Gayner recalled how he had lain pressed to his tree trunk, straining his ears to catch their low voices as they conversed. Always in his years of service he had prided himself on his knowledge of Burmese, not the convoluted repetitions of the written form, but the clipped jargon of the villagers, to which it was possible sometimes to listen for minutes before you grasped what it was about. Gayner had mastered it as few Europeans had ever done, and it had been no small measure of his success when he was a policeman. The three had been arguing about money and cargoes of opium, with the Jap complaining vehemently that there must have been a leak because four out of five recent consignments had gone wrong, having been seized by the Excise in Rangoon.

Gayner's lips had twitched slightly when he heard that. Then with a shock he realized that they were talking about him.

The Zerbuddi turned fiercely to Lim Hsung, the mule contractor, " It is *your* man, the policeman who lives in the bazaar ! "

" *Alaga-a-à !* " (Nonsense !) said Lim Hsung quaveringly. " That old man has long been disgraced. He has no money and no friends. He does not speak with the Government at all, except at the polo. He does not go to the Cullub."

The Jap spat. " I tell you it is ! He writes weekly to Rangoon."

The mule contractor said "*Alagà* " again. " He writes only to one at the College about birds and rats and things. He sends down dead ones in paper. We know. We have opened his letters."

The deuce they had, thought Gayner, the interfering swine ! But he reckoned his pet cipher would have defeated them, and he doubted if they had guessed it was a cipher.

" Nevertheless," said the Jap, " you must arrange that old man, and quickly ! Those little birds of his, and those journeys of his, eastwards up the mountain, are a show."

The contractor gabbled a torrent of Burmese so fast that even Gayner could scarcely follow. He caught the words : " He is a *thakin* . . . much trouble . . . enquiry . . ."

The Jap was clearly angry. He spat again and began to hiss. " You will do it, I say, or there will be trouble . . ."

The spruce Zerbuddi turned the cast in his left eye balefully towards Lim Hsung. He said : " U Kitagawa is right. Let the old man die ! There has been much trouble already. You will arrange it in a week. Now about these tins of honey . . ."

Honey was it again, this time ? The Chinese smugglers had so many ingenious methods for concealing opium on which they rang the changes. But in Gayner's mind the rest of that talk he had heard was a blur. All he could recall was the sound of a heavy

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slouching step a few yards away behind him, a strong feline whiff in his nostrils, and then, outlined against the muleteers' nearest fire, a tiger, tail up in the air, charging at the nearest tethered mule.

The rest was uproar, the agonized braying of the victim as the tiger clung to his nose and neck, the rattle of bells as the other mules jerked away, the barking of the dogs and shouts of muleteers. Then from all quarters, as it seemed, men with torches were converging at speed on Gayner's hiding place.

Gayner, like the baffled tiger, had taken to his heels and run. But from the shouts he guessed they must have seen him and known who he was. There was no other man of his height in Myitkabà. Infernal luck, just as he was hoping to get three birds with one stone! There were always too many tigers about in the game sanctuary and they were over-bold. But those chaps had been quick enough off the mark, almost quicker than tigers, sending someone to nobble Gayner with a blow-pipe on his way in.

Gayner laid his teacup down beside the bed. He would have an hour's sleep and, perhaps, when he woke, he might have some inkling what to do. It was no good worrying.

Gayner woke suddenly two hours later with a feeling of unease. He glanced out of the window. A small boy in a huge bamboo hat was just disappearing out of the back gate.

Very quietly he called Maràn Gam.

"Maràn Gam, who was that boy? I told you no one was to come in!"

"He did not come in, *duwa*. He brought some curry powder. I forgot it yesterday in the bazaar."

"Have you used any?"

"I have not."

"Where did it come from?"

"Lim Kai Taik's shop."

"Show it to me quickly."

He opened the tin. They had not even mixed it beyond recognition. He had always used powdered arsenic to preserve bird skins, and anyone in Burma could buy it without a permit. He knew how well it mixed with other powders, especially curry. He knew, too, how agonizingly his inspector had died, and his two children with him, when they had fallen foul of old Sit Lone, the smuggler, in Henzada years before. But he must not show Maràn Gam how much he knew.

"Put that tin on the table!" he said. "I do not eat curry today. Bring me boiled eggs and coffee in half an hour."

He got up and walked into the sitting room. Well, their first and second barrels had both misfired. But they had not been long in coming. What would their next be, the cunning swine?

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In his old patched dressing-gown, Gayner wandered about the room. The table was laid for the composite meal which in Burma replaces lunch and breakfast. He opened two letters that lay beside his plate. The first was from his bank in Rangoon, a frigidly polite statement to the effect that he was now *Rs.* 37 *overdrawn*, and would Gayner please *put the account in credit as early as possible?*

Well, that was that. He had been living on his sparse capital for years, and now it had petered out. He had no pension left, and his only other source of income was the occasional reward for *information leading to opium seizures*, which one of his very few old friends and fellow naturalist, Barnett, the Excise Commissioner, sent up to him occasionally, and with great secrecy, from Rangoon. He never knew when these sums were coming, but so far no one had detected the means by which they reached him. Barnett had been wont to send back to him, through a professor in the University, two or three of his bird skins with a pencilled note on the label of one asking, " Are you sure this was correctly sexed? " Inside, deep in the tow and wadding which filled the skins, was the money in hundred rupee notes. Some money, he felt, must be due to him now, but he could not count on it for at least a fortnight more.

And meantime he was broke . . . His eye ranged round the room. There were two tables, a few old wicker chairs and a bamboo sofa, two shelves of books, mostly about birds, and a few framed pictures on the walls, nearly all cut out of coloured supplements to magazines. In the rooms on either side were a few worn out clothes, and pots and pans and crockery. There was nothing worth pawning or which he did not need.

From the bamboo stable outside he could hear his old groom murmuring as the brown mare stamped and wriggled at her grooming. Even with their battered and aged forelegs, those two ponies of his were worth six hundred rupees apiece to any polo-player in the station. But Gayner had made up his mind about them long ago. They would never be sold.

Suddenly Gayner found himself wondering what would happen to them if he pre-deceased them. And with it came a sudden vision of those heart-breaking mountain tracks across the river and the headlong descents into China where the " King's road " petered out at the passes. How often down in the sweltering plain of the Irrawaddy had he turned his eyes to those cool heights that he knew were waiting for him only forty miles away, where barbets chanted in the trees and you could look out from a window in the trees over two hundred miles of China. He had gone up there so often for fun. But it was no fun for a loaded mule or pony on gradients like that! No, he must arrange something about the ponies! After the polo tonight would be the time, if he lasted as long.

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He opened the second letter on his table. The neat scholarly handwriting, from one of the greatest taxonomists in the world, could still excite him. His eyes skimmed the closely written sheets :

You got some very interesting things on that Kambaiti trip . . . Suthora, *the only previous records are from Nepal . . . The warblers you queried are both* affinis, *new to India. One was almost certainly wrongly sexed. I know Lewis at the British Museum was quite elated about several of the smaller mammals, but he will be writing to you shortly . . . Do try and get . . . You have a great opportunity . . . the best of luck ! I can't say how much I envy you your chances !*

Envy ! Someone envied him with the shadow of death upon him and not a bean or a friend in the world ! It was queer, thought Gayner, that a tiny willow-warbler, a bundle of barely identifiable feathers two inches long, should so excite that faraway scholar in Romney Marsh, whose fame as an ornithologist had gone out into all lands. It was queer, too, that he should be worrying himself whether he had made a mistake in sexing a small bird shot three months before, when he might be lying dead in the next few hours. Well, he supposed, if he was shot there would be a stately notice in the *Ibis*, deploring his loss as a field-naturalist and discreetly glossing over his fall from the police and his official career.

Gayner sat down in his old wicker chair with the long wooden leg-rests. Two hours' sleep was not enough, for he had been up all night, and had walked or run sixteen miles since four o'clock the previous evening. He still felt weary and gummy eyed and despondent. The polo-final in the evening was bound to be a dog fight, with three natives in the Bhamo team all out for blood, and his own a scratch side with only one player he could depend on. He found himself longing for a drink. But he had not a drop of drink in the house and no money to buy any more !

He was about to shout for Maràn Gam to bring his breakfast, when there were voices outside on the verandah and Maràn Gam appeared hastily. " It is Lim Kai Taik, *duwa.* He wishes to speak to you."

" Lim Kai Taik ? " It was pretty brazen of the chap to come round after sending that curry powder over ! But he was Lim Hsung's brother-in-law, pawnbroker, storekeeper, money lender, pig breeder, with a finger in every pie.

" I will see him," said Gayner. " *Shagà-u.*"

Gayner sat up in his chair and whisked the tin of curry powder into a drawer. He waved to another chair as the fat man, in his high collared long black tunic and white trousers, came smiling and

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bowing into the room. He had clearly come to spy out the land.

The fat man held a little woven bag, such as the Shans imported into Burma, slung on his shoulder. He did not seem to be in a hurry. Most of the Chinese, and nearly all Burmese, spent five or ten minutes coming to the point of a conversation. But Lim Kai Taik had been at a university. He had charming manners and a great knowledge of the Eastern world. Only Gayner, who knew all the underworld of the frontier, knew how often he had been near the dock. But twenty years of dealing with officials had at least taught him to come fairly quickly to the point.

"Maràn Gam said yesterday your whisky was finished, *thakin*," he said in Burmese. "Then I had none in stock, but a new lot came in by the train this morning."

"Indeed?" said Gayner politely. "I have plenty." He spoke as if the threadbare little house concealed a vast cellar.

"Maràn Gam said yours was finished."

"Maràn Gam does not know everything."

"Well, I have brought one bottle. If you wish for any more, will you please let me know?"

Gayner concealed his longing as he looked at the bottle. It meant for him food as well as drink after the game, rest for aching nerves after the racket of that grim final, perhaps oblivion for a few hours. If his team lost, it would soften his regrets. If it won, that bottle would mean a temporary glow of beatitude for him during which, lonely and old and worn out, he could look back serenely on the afternoon's struggle. Perhaps he might even think of some way out of the town. But if he *did* go sound asleep after drinking it . . . *they* would have their chance.

He bowed. "Thank you very much, Lim Kai Taik. I will pay next week."

Lim Kai Taik smiled as he put the bottle on the table.

"I hope, *thakin*, that you will beat Bhamo today."

"They are a good team."

"Ah, but the *thakin* and Feroz Khan are very strong." He smiled, showing discoloured teeth, studded with gold.

Gayner smiled too. "We are both too old! Much too old."

"There is much betting about the game in the bazaar. They say . . ."

"What do they say?"

"That Bhamo will win by seven goals. Their *Súbadár*, Jaimal the Sikh, has said so."

"Probably," said Gayner, as if it did not greatly matter.

The Chinaman rose. His eye travelled round the room, the practised eye of the pawnbroker, pricing Gayner's few possessions. Then he said, "The *thakin* owes me for two months' groceries."

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" I will pay you on Monday, Lim Kai Taik. I am busy today."

Lim Kai Taik bowed and smiled toothily and withdrew. His words meant that Gayner could not " raise the wind " in the bazaar. The Chinese probably knew the state of his bank account as well as he did. They had incredible sources of information.

Then he took up the bottle. The seal and the cork were clearly intact, the bottle was from a famous distillery. Very slowly Gayner turned it upside down, and examined it. Ah, this was their third barrel! He knew that method of extracting whisky from a bottle and doctoring the remainder with a red hot needle. They must think him a fool, or perhaps they were very anxious! He put the bottle down unopened on the table and called to Maràn Gam.

Gayner had just finished eating when he heard, a hundred yards away on the road, the feet of a trotting pony. To his astonishment they seemed to turn down the lane towards his own house. He heard the pony slow up as it came into his compound. He went out.

The stout major, who had just come to command one of the Frontier Force units at Myitkabà, smiled up at the gaunt bearded figure on the verandah.

" Good morning! May I come in for a moment? "

Gayner glared. Then suddenly he decided to take a chance. He must shorten the odds somehow. For ten years at least he had quite deliberately cut himself off, except on the polo-ground, from the other Europeans in the station. But he was lonely and dog tired. Somehow he felt he could trust this fattish, cheerful, shrewd eyed man.

" Please do! My man will take your pony. *Hè*, Moti Ram! "

The two men went upstairs and sat down.

" Cigarette? " said Gayner. " I can't offer you a drink, I'm afraid."

" Oh, that's all right. There's too much alcohol flowing all the time in these ' Weeks.' They're a hideous strain. I came round to talk a bit of shop."

" Shop? " No one had talked official shop to Gayner for years.

" Yes. I hope your team is going to beat Bhamo today, though no one in the Club seems anxious to bet on it. But old Feroz, my *jamadár*, is as keen as mustard. He's got his tail right up. He thinks your team might just do it on the handicap . . ."

" I doubt it." To Gayner this was an understatement.

" You get one and a half goals on the handicap, don't you? "

" We might . . . as long as they don't knock three goals off us in the first chukker. Our One and Two are apt to get a bit rattled, if they're hustled at the start."

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" You're telling me ! I'm afraid I read the Riot Act to those two boys last night. I said they'd got to forget about their blasted polo-boots, and forget about their ponies, and really mark their men. *And* gallop like hell ! I was rather rude."

" That'll do 'em good ! " The old man grunted. " I've wanted to say that to 'em for the last three games."

" I wish you had. Don't be too shy today. Curse their ruddy young heads off ! Come the M.F.H. over 'em a bit more."

" M.F.H. ? " Gayner looked down his grizzled beard and pretended not to understand.

" Yes, I mean that. I know all about your past, I'm afraid." The plump young major smiled a disarming smile. " My uncle used to hunt with the Carron Vale and he told me all about those two amazing seasons you gave 'em after the 1918 war."

" Good Heavens ! " That remark had loosened Gayner's tongue as no other could have done. " I didn't think a soul in Burma knew about *that !* I had sixteen months' leave after I came out of the Army, and the Committee of the Carron Vale, for some reason, couldn't agree on a Master, until I came along, and they put me in, *faute de mieux*. I bust in two seasons about half what my Aunt Maria had just left me. I knew next to nothing when I started, but, thanks to my huntsman and the old hounds we had, we fairly shook that country up. I never had such a time in my life ! "

" People still talk of those seasons down there ! Pity you couldn't have carried on."

" At the end of two seasons I was broke to the wide. I simply couldn't. Then I came back here and went, as you see," he grinned, " steadily downhill."

The younger man went on : " One day very soon I want to hear all about that. I've been meaning to come round and see you ever since they posted me here. I know the Carron Vale well. But look ! This is the shop I want to talk. The Bhamo side have got one pony dead lame in their team and they've got the Committee's permission to put in a fresh pony this afternoon as it's a final. I said your team might want to do the same, and the Committee agreed. Are both those two ponies of yours sound ? "

" The bay isn't too good. He's had his near fore in a bucket ever since the last game. I was intending to play him, but . . ."

" Well now, listen ! That big dun pony of ours, Number 33, is fit again, and Feroz Khan wants to play him. I'd much rather he didn't. He's the best pony we've got in the battalion, and old Feroz is apt to be much too hard on 'em when he's out for blood in a final, as he will be today. I suggest we put Number 33 in as your second pony, and Feroz can play two chukkers on the spare."

The old man relaxed all over. The lines smoothed out of his

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face. " I can't tell you how grateful I am," he said. " I've played tournament polo for thirty five years in Burma off and on, and nine ponies a team, even with five minute chukkers, is just bloody murder in a final. Years ago at Mandalay I remember once we tied and had to play two chukkers overtime in a final. I played the same poor beggar of a pony, *Goodboy* they called him, the last three chukkers on end ! He was the only one I could depend on, and if you'll believe me, tired as he was, he seemed the most unconcerned creature on the ground, man or beast, when we went out for the last time. Thank you very much indeed ! "

" That's settled, then." The young man did not look at Gayner. " I'll let my chaps know."

In the glow of the conversation, Gayner had almost forgotten the events of the night before. Now he suddenly remembered, and decided to take his chance.

" Look here, major," he said, " will you listen to me for five minutes ? "

" Certainly," said the young man.

The old man shut both doors carefully and, clearing his throat, began.

" To begin with, if anything happens to myself in the next few days, would you be good enough to take my two ponies into your lines as troop-ponies, or have them shot ? "

" Certainly," said the major. He looked surprised. " But why ? What's the trouble ? "

" I may have to be . . . selling up."

" I'm sorry to hear it."

" And I can't bear the thought of those two skins of mine being sold into a caravan." He waved towards the great hills which shone blue in the sun across the river. " If you don't, they'll be breaking their poor old hearts with three hundred pound loads up there, year in, year out, sound or lame, uphill and down. I've ridden 'em pretty hard while I've had 'em, but . . . they've been treated like kings in between."

" I think I can promise that. Assuming they're fairly sound, I believe our Remount Officer down at the Depot would be very glad to take 'em on. My *salutri* was talking to me about your brown mare only the other day. But what's all this about your selling up ? "

Gayner grinned again, though it cost him an effort.

" As a matter of fact, there are certain people who are after me. They've had three shots this morning, and that won't be the last. See that bottle of whisky, which I've never offered you ? "

" Yes."

" Well, if you and I drank a peg out of that, I wouldn't mind

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betting we'd be flat on the floor unconscious, in five minutes."

"Good Lord, do you mean that? Who's after you?"

"It's a long story," said Gayner, "but for years I've been sending down to a friend of mine in Rangoon information about the opium going through here from there." He waved at the hills again. "I was pretty broke after I got turned out of the police, and it helped me to turn an occasional honest penny, for if they did make a seizure, they paid me pretty well in the matter of rewards. As you probably know, opium does little harm with the jungly folk up here. It's when it gets down to the Lower Burman in the towns! It was no use my passing the information on to any official up here. I was an outcast myself, and if I'd mixed myself up with them, either they wouldn't have believed me, or the other side would have guessed at once where the information was coming from. Seven-tenths of the opium going down to Rangoon got picked up quietly when it reached there, and in most cases the local police here didn't even know it was going down."

"I see. No wonder you are supposed to be an opium smoker yourself." The young major's smile robbed the words of any offence.

The old man grinned back out of his beard.

"I had to trapse around with some very low types to get the information I wanted. But that isn't the point! Last night, quite by accident, down in the game sanctuary near Pyindaung, I came across the three main links in the smuggling chain all together. One of them, from Mandalay, we'd only suspected before, and the third, from Rangoon, was quite unknown. Unfortunately, we were interrupted by a tiger going for one of their mules. There was a bit of a mix-up and I had to get away quickly. They spotted me, and are very much out to nobble me as a result. But there's a lot more to it than that! Some of the stuff I heard last night would make the Military Intelligence people sit up on end, I give you my word! I *must* get that down in code, somehow, to my chap."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'll write it all out before the game. If I slip you my cigarette case on the ground, will you see it's sealed up and sent down to Rangoon by someone you can trust?"

"Of course I will. One of my best Indian officers is going down on the night mail for a signalling course. I'll see he delivers it, and he'll think it's a parcel of mine. But why don't you go?"

"I can't afford the fare."

"Well, surely we could manage that?"

"If you did, I'd never arrive. They're pretty quick off the mark, those gentry, and they guess I overheard them last night. Do you see that old woman?" He flicked his cigarette ash towards the other window.

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" The one sitting under the brolly outside the gate ? "

" Well, *she's* there to see that no one comes or goes out of this house without my friends knowing all about it. She'll be wondering now what we're talking about all this time. In fact, I'm going to curse *you* out of this house, if you don't mind, when you go."

" Curse me ? "

" Yes ; I don't want them to guess how helpful you've been to me. But thank you ! We're going to win that game against Bhamo today if it *can* be done, I promise you ! And I'll smuggle that parcel to you on the ground."

" Good enough ! Sure I can't give you any other help ? I could easily send down a couple of sepoys to sleep on your verandah."

Gayner grinned. " No, thanks ! I haven't a clue how I'm going to get away with it, but until this final is over, I don't propose to worry." He shook hands. " Now I'm going to start the cursing ! " He raised his voice in a sudden roar of anger. " Moti Ram ! *Sahib ke ghora le-ao, jaldi.*"

" *Ji, sahib !* "

Moti Ram came hurrying from the stables with the chestnut.

The young man was a quicker thinker than his comfortable exterior implied. He went rather hurriedly down the steps and did not look at or speak to his host as he mounted the pony.

" And *you*, blast you," roared Gayner, looking down on him from the verandah, " can get out of my house ! I don't want anything to do with you or the flaming Club ! Get to Hell out of here quickly ! " He stamped indoors and slammed the door.

It was the major, however, who, five minutes later, came in rather late to the Club meeting and threw a bombshell into the quiet room where the committee of " The Week " were discussing last minute details of the evening's dinner dance. He looked at the chart of the dinner table.

" You've forgotten old Gayner ! "

" Who ? "

" Jimmie Gayner."

" But he lives in the bazaar ! "

" He's also captaining one of the teams in the final. If it wins, you can't very well omit him."

" Mr. Gayner is socially quite impossible." This was Mrs. Luggan, the wife of the Deputy Commissioner.

" Well, I'm not so sure of that. He's the only distinguished man in the station, for what it's worth."

" Distinguished ! " Mrs. Luggan snorted, if a lady can.

" He got a D.S.O. in 1916, and thirty years ago he got a King's Police Medal—and an unusually good one, too ! And you ask any

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naturalist in England about him and his discoveries and see what they say ! "

" I doubt if he has any dress clothes, and he'll varra probably be tipsy ! " Mrs. Luggan spoke with withering scorn.

" Well, Mrs. Luggan, if it comes to that," the plump major twinkled, " I like a drop of drink myself, and a polo-final celebration is in the same category as a bump-supper or a hunt-ball. He won't be the only one ! " He glanced at the young forest officer at the other side of the table who had just called for his third pink gin.

Mrs. Luggan, as the senior lady in the station, regarded herself as the unquestioned arbiter of its society.

" But, Major Arbuthnot, I do not know him socially at all. I doubt if he has called on a single *memsahib* here."

" Well, if you ask me," put in the young policeman, " I think that shows his common sense. In a tiny place like this, don't you think all this calling's dashed silly ? "

" I do not," said Mrs. Luggan icily. " It's an accepted custom and a matter of common politeness. We cannot possibly invite Mr. Gayner."

" Oh, come, Mrs. Luggan . . . It'll be dashed awkward if . . ." began the stout major.

A girl who had been sitting reading in a distant corner of the room, suddenly rose and came towards the table. Her brother, the young forest officer with the pink gin, gave her an imploring look. This pretty sister of his, who had grown up so suddenly and gone down so amazingly well with everyone on the voyage out, was always doing things which shocked his sense of decorum.

" Really, Marion ! " he said. " This is a *Committee* meeting ! "

Marion Orme went scarlet, but stood her ground. " I'm sorry, Bill, but I couldn't help overhearing ! Remember, if Mr. Gayner helps to win that final today, and he's not allowed to come to the party, *I* don't come either ! It's *the* most ghastly snobbishness I ever struck, like not asking a farmer who wins your hunt point-to-point to a hunt-ball."

" Marion, *please !* "

" I mean it ! "

" Well," began Mrs. Luggan with awful sarcasm, " I'm sure we shall all be varra sorry."

A silence fell on the room as the girl walked away. The faces of two young men on the Committee fell. Girls like that during a " Week " in a station like Myitkabà were at a premium. If you gave a dance on a band night and then had nothing to dance with but all the old frumps of wives . . .

" Well, if you ask me, Mrs. Luggan," said the Gurkha major, " that's the freshest bit of sense I've heard today . . ."

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The wrangle looked likely to go on till tiffin-time.

Jimmie Gayner would have laughed till his wrinkles cracked if he had heard that conversation. He had always avoided the Club, though he went to its library and read the papers occasionally on a hot afternoon, when he was sure nobody else was there.

The cloudless day was hotter than ever. Gayner, in his old dressing-gown and a pair of tattered red slippers, sat at his table encoding the message which he wished to reach Rangoon. He took first a tray of bird skins from a drawer. That was for what he called "local colour."

Then on a sheet of paper he wrote:

List of birds obtained Tasubum—Samà area July, 1938.

That also was local colour. Then very carefully he began to write, stopping every few minutes with half closed eyes.

To the naturalist, the list of symbols after the numbers and names of birds meant so many numbered specimens sexed as male and so many female. To Gayner, and to one man at the other end, the male symbol stood for a dash in the Morse code and the female symbol for a dot. No one else had ever thought of checking up on the birds he sent down with these lists. He had managed to get through all sorts of messages in that way for nearly seven years.

Half an hour later, with the sweat standing out on his forehead, he had nearly completed the message. He raised his head suddenly at the sound of a soft step on the stairs. Normally about one visitor a month came to see him, but today his shabby house was, for some reason, like Piccadilly Circus.

He flung the door open, a towering angry figure in his tattered dressing gown, and glared at the intruder. Even the old Burmese watcher, ostensibly selling cheroots under her umbrella outside the gate, could hear him gasp. A girl was standing there, a slim English girl of about nineteen, in a white dress. Gayner had not spoken to a European woman in the station for nearly twelve years. The gaunt old man could have frozen any other woman in Myitkabà—even Mrs. Luggan—off his verandah in two seconds. But . . . talk of the face that launched a thousand ships! thought Gayner.

He gasped again. The face that met his glare had brought all his buried past back in a flash as he himself had never dared to do. He was back again in the year 1921, a clean shaven figure in a mud splashed red coat and stained white breeches and a velvet cap, a figure who watched his hounds and hunt-servants jogging ahead of him in the gathering dusk, and who turned, one hand on a bay horse's rump, to look at a young woman in a blue habit behind him. The same steadfast eyes were fixed upon him now. And he heard again a forgotten voice say softly "Good night,

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Jimmie, my dear. Only two more days before the season ends. Won't you come round this evening and have dinner ? "

Gayner's fierce gaze dropped from the eyes of the slim girl as they had dropped from those of the other girl so long ago. Now he held the bamboo door of his sitting room open and stood aside.

" Will you come in ? " he said. There was no anger in his voice, only great amazement as she walked into the room. He shut the door behind her. " As you see, my house is hardly meant for entertaining ladies. And do you mind telling me your name ? You have the advantage of me, though . . . I . . . I can guess who you are."

The girl's grey eyes had swept round the threadbare room, from the shelves of nature books to the whisky bottle on the table. Then she said, " I'm Marion Orme, Mr. Gayner. You knew my mother well."

He nearly replied " Too well ! " It was true, but it sounded wrong. He said slowly, " Yes, we hunted together for two seasons."

" I've heard about those seasons ! " Marion Orme smiled. " I've also heard a great deal about *you*, from my mother."

Had she, by God ! Gayner had never uttered a word to a soul. But he had not stopped thinking for all these years. And this, this was the girl who ought to have been his own daughter. Ought ! How could he, a man of forty eight, a heavy drinker, spending the last remnants of his aunt's legacy on waking up a moribund hunt, have asked any young woman to share a policeman's life in Burma, and his life above all ?

He saw himself again on that last evening walk with her, before he had packed up and fled so suddenly. The April sun was shining again on daffodils in the rain washed grass, on flowering pussy-willow down by the pond, on the pink buds of the young larches in the wood beyond. He heard himself saying, " No, my dear. You know very well what I feel about you, but there are reasons . . . which I won't disclose even to you."

Heaven knows what she'd thought of those reasons ! Drunkenness, family mania, debts, crime, a Burmese wife ! She had tried to make him stay. But then he had turned abruptly and left her staring, and gone back by the next ship to the delta, feeling savage and old and hopeless. He had shown the Inspector-General very shortly after that that he didn't give a damn for anyone or anything. They had forced his hand at last, and he had left the police under a cloud and commuted his small pension. Since then he must have spent thousands gambling on races and wandering up and down the country until at last he had settled at Myitkabà, where one of his dreams, that of the rare birds and the unknown hills, could flower at last. And now those two polo-ponies with their battered

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legs were all that was left of the spacious life of his prime, and this girl, sitting like a picture in his shabby old chair, was the daughter of a man he had never seen, but had hated for years.

For the first time, Gayner smiled at her.

"You're extraordinarily like your mother!" he said at last, and the banal words hid his racing thoughts. "I'm afraid I never guessed, when your brother came up here as forest officer, who he was. I, er, haven't met him to speak to."

"He hates horses," she said, "and forest work, too, for that matter. All Bill wants is a pleasant office job under a fan, and a club to come back and drink in, in the evening. But I'm forgetting. First, I've brought you a letter from my mother." She fumbled in her bag.

"How is she?"

"Poor darling! She was crippled very badly in a hunting accident two years ago, and my father died when I was ten. She's very much hoping to see you as soon as you do come home."

"Not 'as soon as,'" he said, smiling again. "'If' is, I think, the word."

"But of course you will! You can't possibly end your days out here!"

Couldn't he? This might well be his last.

But all he said was, "I'm old and a bit set in my ways, Miss Orme. This country tends to grow on one."

She smiled, and her grey eyes seemed to flutter, as those other eyes had fluttered of old.

"Old?" she said. "I watched you playing on Thursday, and I found myself wishing I could ride like that, quite apart from hitting a polo ball when I was doing it! It was marvellous. Someone told me . . ."

"Yes?" The old man almost purred. For twelve years he had not bothered about what anyone thought or said of him.

". . . He told me you were carrying the whole side and playing about four goals over your handicap."

She smiled again.

"There's just been an awful row in the Club about you. Something I said may have been the cause. But I want you to promise faithfully that you'll come to the party tonight!"

"My dear, that simply can't be done! I only go to the Club to borrow books and read the papers, very occasionally."

"And I say you *must*. If this stupid Committee won't allow us to sit together at dinner, we'll have a small table to ourselves. If you win today . . ."

The old man temporized. "We haven't won yet, Miss Orme! It's about three to one against with those three natives in the Bhamo

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team, *and* young Rennie. He's a fine hitter, and they're all very well mounted."

"We'll leave it at that!" said Marion Orme, smiling. "I was nearly forgetting to give you my mother's letter. She told me to be sure and make enquiries about you when I got to Rangoon. I never guessed you'd be in the same station as my brother!"

The old man's hand closed on the letter. It was a fat packet, and suddenly, as he felt it, he glanced at the whisky bottle on the table and knew he had a stimulant for the next twelve hours more potent than any alcohol could be to him.

"God bless you!" he said at last. "I won't swear I'll come to the party, but, anyway, we'll have a crack at those chaps in the final this afternoon!"

The girl stood up and shook hands. "I must go," she said. "I've been asked out to a lunch party. The very best of luck this afternoon, and I'll see you tonight!"

Suddenly Gayner had an inspiration. "Can you wait a few more minutes and take something to Major Arbuthnot for me? And say absolutely nothing to anyone?"

"Of course."

Gayner sat down again at the table and drew out the paper on which he had been writing. Hurriedly in his queer code he scrawled—

This bit about the Japs coming through Siam is really vital, and I'm sure of it. I may not be able to confirm it either verbally or later in writing, but please see Wallace in M.I. gets it at once.

"This is it," he said at last, folding the paper in his cigarette case. "If you'd pass this case of mine quietly to Major Arbuthnot."

"Excuse me!" The girl opened the cigarette case very deliberately and looked inside. Across the lid was engraved:

Presented to Major J. H. Gayner, D.S.O., M.F.H., by the Committee of the Carron Vale Hunt in grateful recognition of the Seasons 1919-20 *and* 1920-21.

"My mother told me about that," she said. "You wouldn't give them a chance to do more for you. They wanted to paint your portrait. The Carron Vale are rather a comic show now, I'm afraid. Until tonight then; and you've simply got to come!"

She shut the case, slipped it into her bag and was gone.

Gayner went into the inner room. There was no hurry now. He lay down on his bed to read the letter which had come to him after all these years. He read while the sun of earliest November

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noon blazed down, and then with a little sigh he tucked the letter under his pillow and fell asleep. The old face no longer twitched.

It was three o'clock. Gayner had drawn on one boot, and was fastening the strap between the buttons on his knee, when a faint sound through the wall caught his ear. Behind him were two bathrooms, side by side, as in most bungalows, with outer doors opening on to the staircase used by the sweepers. One was his own and one stood empty, except for some camp-kit and an old tin bath. The sweeper rarely entered it, but the sound had come from there.

The cunning swine! thought Gayner. No one would expect anyone to come in there in the middle of the afternoon. It only showed their determination. Noiselessly he eased off on a jack the boot which he had just drawn on. He stood up in the torn silk stockings, which he always wore beneath his boots at polo. He glanced round the room for a weapon. Ah, the tree! He picked up the centre-piece of his boot-tree, a solid block of wood over two feet long with a club handle such as the old bootmakers favoured thirty years ago. He threw the other sections of the trees together in a clattering heap and edged his way flat footed to the bathroom.

With infinite slowness Gayner turned the handle in his left hand, then flung the door inwards with a sudden wide sweep as far as it would go. He felt it hit something which gave, and then he was round it, the tree held in his right hand, like a tiger.

There was no need for haste. The little man must have been crouching a foot behind the door and by a queer chance the inner handle had caught him on the point of the chin. He lay in a crumpled heap against the wall, his knees drawn up, completely out for the moment.

Gayner recognized him as a frequenter of Lim Kai Taik's drinkshop, which had a brothel and an opium den behind it. He was a man with three or four petty convictions for theft. Gayner passed his hands over the limp body. There was a small, very sharp knife in a sheath stuck in the belt of his trousers and another with a small square tin of opium in a pocket under his arm. Doubtless, thought Gayner, they had filled him up well before they sent him on that errand in daylight! It showed that they must be really anxious to silence him. He stooped down.

Five minutes later, Gayner came back into his bedroom. The little man now lay behind a pile of camp-kit, disarmed and scientifically gagged with plaster and tow out of the skinning-box, his arms and legs lashed tight with cord and old stirrup-leathers. Gayner knew and despised the fat station officer of the local police. He did not want any of his lumbering enquiries in the bungalow

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just before a polo-final. It was a hundred to one against his servant going into that empty bathroom before he himself returned from polo. The little assassin, like the other problems, could wait.

Gayner washed his hands carefully and again very deliberately drew on the patched and shining boots. Then with equal care he knotted his old blue silk stock round the gnarled and weather beaten throat and put on his coat. A brush upwards of the great moustache and eyebrows and he was ready.

At his shout the groom came hurrying down the path from the stables. He led two ponies, rugged and booted, and carried a canvas bucket and a bundle of sticks. They made a queer contrast, the sleek ponies and the old man in his immaculate white coat and *pugri*, and their bearded wrinkled owner, in a battered old white polo-helmet, with his shining boots below threadbare yellow breeches and an old shooting coat with leather patches on the elbows.

True to long custom, Gayner spent three full minutes looking the ponies over, their grooming, their shoes, their quilted boots, their tail bandages, and the fit of their curbs and numnahs before he mounted. Glancing about from under his shaggy brows, there seemed to him to be quite a few people watching him from houses round about. Perhaps they had seen that little stinker creep in!

It was queer, he thought irrelevantly, what a rotten time ponies always have in fast polo and how serene they are before it! Here he was himself with dried throat and aching nerves, hating the ordeal before him and wishing it were all over. And his ponies just looked at him with shining eyes . . . Then he thought of that empty bungalow as it would be in the dusk in an hour and a half, with the insects buzzing round the lamp, and his whole soul aching for the whisky he knew had been doctored.

Well, it was no good looking too far ahead! If the worst came to the worst, he would have that long letter to devour once again. And before that he would see that nice young girl, who had so nearly been his own daughter, and show her that an old man could still hustle about a polo-ground! And that kindly young major chap who had promised him the dun pony which was the best in the battalion . . . he couldn't let him down after that offer.

The groom leant his weight on the off-stirrup as Gayner mounted the brown mare. Throwing his leg over he thought, Hell! I ought to have got new leathers and my girth-straps restitched. Well, too late now!

Then very statelily, followed by the old groom on the limping bay pony, Gayner rode out towards the bazaar. He would show these Chinese beggars he wasn't down yet.

It was the deepest hush of a hot afternoon, and no life stirred

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as yet on the dusty roads. In a quarter of an hour or so, the townsfolk would begin to drift out of their houses to the railway station to watch the afternoon train come in, or to look at the polo.

Gayner rode past the shops and the opium dens, past the bazaar itself and its surrounding huddle of tin-roofed shacks and liquor shops and lodginghouses, till suddenly the houses began to open out. On his right was the river, half a mile wide, with a flight of terns drifting down it in the sunshine. Beyond the river was the steamy mass of foothills spreading miles away to the foot of the ruddy brown mountains which had been damson-dark at dawn.

The breeze blew cool on his cheek, and suddenly he saw, between scattered houses, a wide expanse of mown green grass, at each end of which red flags blew on white-bound wicker posts. Ah! He turned a corner, and there already were the two dark clusters of ponies from the military police lines, waiting on each side of a line of chairs set in the shadows of great tamarinds.

There suddenly, beyond the squalor, the poverty and the makeshifts which had been Gayner's life for the last ten years, were waiting for him colour and form, swiftness and rhythm, ecstasy and achievement. He was broke and damned and thinking of his end, but for one more half hour he would be a god, and not a worn-out old outcast. For one more half hour the heart of his life would beat fiercely again. Sunshine and galloping hooves on green grass, dust and high endeavour: what more could any man want in life or to remember?

James Gayner took a deep reviving breath and cocked his battered white topee on his head. That shabby little house of his in the bazaar, which tonight would be as dangerous as a snakepit, was forgotten. With a sudden sureness he knew that today he would find his form, and that his ponies would do whatever he demanded of them. What came after could wait.

The ball went out in a flurry of dust and ponies' booted legs.

Gayner, as he cantered watchfully behind the game, closely attended by the Sikh *havildár* who played One for Bhamo, was thinking what a fluke it had been so far, that they had given so much better mounted a side a game at all. He had rattled them badly at the start by coming right up at the throw-in and sneaking away, on the dun pony, with the ball which had, somehow, come through twenty four ponies' legs to lie neatly in front of him. The dun's pace had carried Gayner beyond the opposing Back almost before he had known what was happening. That had been a lucky one! It had caused the old Sikh, Jaimal Singh, to lie right back until half-time lest he should be caught like that again.

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Gayner had rattled the other team once more just before half time with a glorious sixty yard penalty hit which rose and rose and soared between the posts over their heads—a shot he had tried in vain to bring off for years. And the other side had been shaken even more badly in the fourth chukker when their Number Three, in a desperate hurry on a hard-pulling pony, had crossed their own Back, who was crowding on all sail to come through. Both ponies had nearly come down, but it had kept Bhamo quiet for half a chukker. But now, Gayner knew, the pace and the faster ponies and the work of the better drilled team were beginning to tell, and his own tiring side were on the defensive more and more. The two bewildered young players in front of Feroz Khan were finding it harder and harder to mark their men.

As the ball went out, the bugle blew and an umpire raised his whistle to his lips. The sweat-sodden ponies turned and trotted off the ground.

" Half a goal down, and I make it just four and a half minutes more to go," said a man at the timekeeper's table. " I don't think your chaps have got a hope."

Major Arbuthnot nodded.

" No, but it's been a marvellous effort. Both Feroz and the Old Man have been playing about three goals over their handicaps the whole time."

" They have and all. I must congratulate Feroz." He raised his voice, " *Shabàsh, jamadár sahib, shabàsh !* "

The old black bearded Punjabi grinned and raised his stick to his turban as he trotted past them. His scarlet jersey was plum-coloured with sweat and dust. As he dismounted, three *sowars* in spotless white undress fussed around him. He prepared to get up on the team's spare pony, the only fresh one on the side.

Behind him the " Old Man," James Gayner, masked even more deeply in dust and sweat from his helmet to his boots, rode off the ground on the dun pony, Number 33, as in a dream. He was secretly very proud of the past half hour, during which his scratch team had so unexpectedly been endowed with rhythm and wisdom and understanding, far above their normal form, against a close-knit regimental side. But now he felt dog tired and aching, with a dry throat and tongue, and a lump as big as an egg under his arm where his ribs had stopped a rising ball. Half a goal down, with tired ponies, and with those two inexperienced young men in front of him ! It wasn't much. Anything might happen in the next five minutes, and that short time was quite enough for their opponents to put on three more goals.

But his voice, as he dismounted, rang with false confidence.

" Well done, you two lads ! " he said. " There's nothing to

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worry about. We're doing dam' well! Under five minutes to go now and we've got them stone cold."

Gayner wished they had. He might be stone cold himself in a while when he returned to that bungalow and whatever awaited him.

"I tell you we've got 'em rattled! All you need to do is to keep galloping and mark your men. Give Feroz Khan a chance to come through. Come on, God help us, and let's get on and finish it! *Shabàsh, jamadár sahib,*" he turned and grinned at the old jemadar, "*sab teek hai!*"

The old Mussulman grinned back and shook his head, a great dark smile between his beard and his *pugri.* Gayner took the reins of his well beloved brown pony. Her tongue was tied down with lampwick, because in a fast game she contrived to get it so often over the bit. She let him mount her sedately, then bucked her way furiously out on to the ground. Gayner gave to her nonchalantly, twiddling his stick to tighten the loop of it round his wrist, knowing that ten yards out on the ground she would slow up and move as perfectly as she had always done. He had played the brown mare for seven seasons, and had never played a more honest pony, but she never got over that fiercely expressed distaste of going out on to the field.

The last chukker was starting in a corner. As Gayner rode past the silent watching "station," the society of Myitkabà sitting in their wicker chairs, the slim girl in white waved to him.

"Good luck, Mr. Gayner!" she called; and he could see Mrs. Luggan, sitting near her, bristle at her gaucherie. "I do believe you'll pip them yet!"

No one else in the Station had ever seen the old man smile, but he did at that moment. He touched his hat.

"Bless your heart, my dear!" he said cheerfully. "There are times when I almost believe we might."

Then he cantered slowly out to his place.

For a moment the eight ponies were quiet, ears cocked towards the sideline, as one umpire cantered out beyond them on to the ground and the other rode slowly towards them, fumbling for a ball in the wallets of his saddle.

Old Gayner, drawn back a little from the rest of his team, savoured that moment which seemed to last an hour.

Was all life like this, one long still moment of waiting, and then a hurried anxious scramble, a mêlée of dust and sweat and disappointment, snatching at irrecoverable opportunities? Gayner had time for one sweeping glance beneath his shaggy brows at the tree-shadows lengthening out over the smooth green turf, at the time-keeper at his table with the uniformed trumpeter behind him, at the line of chairs where the "Station" watched, and at the

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parti-coloured crowd squatting in the sun on the other side of the ground, Lashio and Chingpaw, Chinese and Shan, Burman and Indian, under the great banyan trees.

For how many seasons had those sights and the lovely late afternoon light of Burma meant a draught of the wine of life for him? For how many . . . ? He took a deep breath and settled himself firmly in the saddle. He gripped his stick and his whip-hand went forward to touch the bristles of the brown mare's mane. Half a goal down. The little more and how much it was! Here goes, he thought, anyway, and damn the result. *Carpe diem!*

The umpire rode at the six close-locked ponies jostling towards him and threw in the ball.

Two minutes later, the American, whose job was prospecting for gold somewhere on the Uyu river a hundred miles west of Myitkabà, looked at the scoreboard across the ground.

"Bhamo 6 MKA 5½," he read slowly. "Gosh, this is some battle! My money's on the yellow jerseys, but those two beavers in red are playing a mighty fine game. Who is the black man?"

"He's an Indian Officer of the Frontier Force," said his neighbour shortly.

"A hired man?"

"Well, not quite. He's playing this game for love, though he's a professional soldier."

"And what age may the other old daddy with the beard be?"

"About sixty five, I believe."

"Is that so? And is he your Commissioner?" The American had never quite got used to the ceremonial of the little Station where every European seemed to hold some official position.

"Indeed no!" It was a snort from a chair further along the line, the chair occupied by Mrs. Luggan. "He's not an official at all. He's only . . . a librrarry member of the Club!"

"You don't say, ma'am?" said the American very politely. "Wa'al if I could gallop like that and play ball like that in my old age, I guess *I* could afford to be a bit exclusive."

There was a hush which could be felt along the line of the station chairs. Only Marion Orme, I fear, smiled under her hat.

A moment later the ball hit the Bhamo Back's pony on the hock, rebounded and went behind the line in a flurry of racing ponies. As he turned to canter back for the hit-out, Gayner raised his whip hand and rubbed the dust off his old wrist-watch with the metal guard. There were just under two minutes more, he reckoned, and it was high time he took a chance. Poor old Feroz Khan was getting his tail down. That last shot of his, almost at right angles under his pony's neck, had been a marvellous effort with two men marking

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him, but it had just missed being a goal, and that was that.

Gayner made a sign to Feroz Khan who dropped back to the centre of the ground, while Gayner himself cantered hurriedly off towards the side-line as if he was going to change his stick or his pony. He knew something had got to be done quickly. He felt once more " as tired as a hunted fox," and he hated the risk of trying to meet the ball when galloping fast. If he missed . . . and it was so easy to miss when you met the ball! Well, there was nothing else for it. One had to bore into the mêlée and make one's own chances at polo.

The old Sikh, Jaimal Singh, who was hitting out from the goal-line, was considered one of the safest backs in Burma. He himself was taking no chances at this stage of the game, for only he knew what a near thing it had been so far. He hit out very strongly towards the side line and towards his own Number Two, the captain of the team. It was beautifully timed.

A second later, Captain Rennie, the young cavalry officer, was into his stride and galloping at speed down on the line of the ball as it came diagonally past him from behind. Suddenly, head on to him and almost knee to knee on his near side, he was aware of a brown pony racing towards him, of someone else's stick scooping at the moving ball, of the ball which seemed to run halfway up the shaft of the stick, and cannon off the brown pony's near shoulder, then of Gayner's sodden red jersey, topped by his grey beard, brushing past him at full speed, and Gayner's voice roaring " Go! " to someone Captain Rennie could not see.

Before the young man could check, before even he knew what had occurred, Gayner, in possession of the ball, was several lengths clear of him and racing for the Bhamo goal.

Jaimal Singh, the wise old Sikh back, cantering on in the wake of his own hit-out, found himself caught again as he had been caught in the very first minute of the game. He jabbed his pony in the mouth and stopped and wheeled in a flash and groped for the ball as it swept almost under the pony's belly, but it was too late. One and a half seconds later, Gayner, clear of both opponents, was leaning over to one side and tapping the ball very deliberately between the posts.

" Fluke! " thought Gayner, as he cantered through them, " the most ungodly fluke I ever brought off in my life! I couldn't do that again if I tried for a year! "

" My sainted aunt! " said a voice at the timekeeper's table as the Kumaoni goal-judge raised his scarlet flag to signal a goal, " if the Old Devil hasn't pulled it off again! But *what* a risk, to meet the ball on the near side of his pony at that pace! They've got just under two more minutes to go."

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"Oh boy! oh boy!" said the American driller rapturously to no one in particular. "And are you telling me that he's only a *library* member of your Club?"

"About forty seconds more to go," said the timekeeper to his companion at the table. He glanced back at the Mussulman trumpeter fingering his bugle. "Your chaps *ought* to do it now, but . . . my Lord Almighty!"

Out of a scramble in the centre of the ground, the young cavalry officer, Captain Rennie of the Bhamo team, had somehow disengaged himself from the incessant attentions of Feroz Khan, and shot out with the ball. Five lengths away from him, and a little to one side, Gayner had turned in a flash and, closely-ridden by the opposing Number One, was racing towards his own goal. One short stroke to get up speed and make sure he was clear of Feroz Khan, and then Captain Rennie hit, a beautifully timed shot at the full speed of his pony, which flashed past Gayner's pony and seemed to go on and on, straight down the field.

The goalposts, twenty four feet wide, seemed to yawn for that hurrying ball.

"By George, they've done it in the last minute! But what a shot!" thought Gayner. He was driving the brown mare along with whip and legs as he had never driven her since he had owned her, his long body slightly turned and leaning hard against the bony Sikh *havildár* on his offside who was marking him. Then, oh joy! Gayner saw the ball slow up and it stopped a length out from the left hand goalpost. There was still a chance.

"Money for old rope if I muck it," thought Gayner. He threw a quick glance back over his left shoulder. He and the Sikh *havildár* were still about five lengths clear of Captain Rennie, who was galloping in his wake all he knew, with Feroz Khan on the team's spare pony, a whirl of elbows and whip and fiercely-driving legs, racing along a length and a half behind him.

"Last chukker," muttered Gayner grimly to himself, "and one more shot to play!"

Always, among all the strokes one had to attempt at polo, Gayner had loved and practised the backhander on the near side of his pony. It was, to most men, never one of the easy shots. You were hitting, as it were, round your own body. You had to tuck your left elbow and whip well out of the way, and your left leg, too; and all that was apt to cramp the follow-through of your right arm when you hit. Besides, at a really fast pace it was never so easy to control the direction of the ball, and the shot was so often liable to be stopped by other ponies galloping behind you. And if, too, as at that moment, a maddened Sikh, all beard and iron-hard

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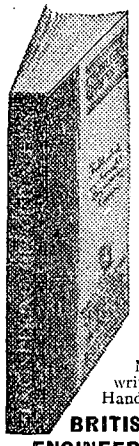

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bones, was riding you hard on your offside, on a heavy pony almost out of control, it needed the nicest judgment to time your approach and your stroke, and not let your own pony be swept over the ball. But it was ecstasy when all those complicated factors came right in one split-second as one rode.

Gayner leant hard against the Sikh Number One, keeping him well away from the line of the ball, and the two ponies, locked together, thundered down the ground. A few lengths from the ball, Gayner relaxed his own weight gradually and let the weight of the other pony bear him little by little towards it, while he cleared his stick-arm and rose a little in his stirrups.

He was riding the brown mare flat out straight for the left-hand post, but he calculated that there was just room to miss the post when he followed through. He could feel the Sikh's iron elbow in the sore spot on his ribs, and the Sikh's left leg and spur were kicking and niggling at the brown mare's side. With his stick in the air, Gayner made one tiny flicker, a sign which Feroz Khan behind him would understand and know which way to turn.

At the last instant Gayner realized he was a fraction too far away from the ball for perfect timing. He relaxed his rein again, then leant over and leant far out with all his weight on the near stirrup. Then he hit as he had never hit a polo-ball before, with a sweeping follow-through which sent it soaring, head-high, a third of the way up the field. As he did so, he heard and felt the near stirrup leather break. Then the saddle itself seemed to sink away.

Jamadár Feroz Khan, wrenching round his sobbing bay pony short by the head almost under the ball, heard, even as he closed his legs to gallop again, a queer jumbled sound, a crack, a thud and another crack behind him. Feroz Khan had never been able to pass any promotion examinations except by courtesy of the examiner, but for all that he was by far the quickest thinker on a polo-ground of any of the eight men there. He relaxed his legs and rein-hand in a flash, and glanced over his shoulder in time to see a crumpled red form against the reeling post and a loose saddle upside down beside it.

Ten yards further on, Gayner's brown mare, saddleless, riderless, reins flowing, ears cocked, her head turning from side to side, was slowing to a long slinging trot and circling back towards the Frontier Force ponies under the tamarinds from whom she was never going to be parted again.

Feroz Khan turned. He trotted back deliberately towards his own goal, even as both umpires' whistles blew to stop the game. Somehow Feroz knew there was no point in hurrying. The sweat streamed down his forehead, but on his dark cheek a drop which was not sweat ran down into his beard.

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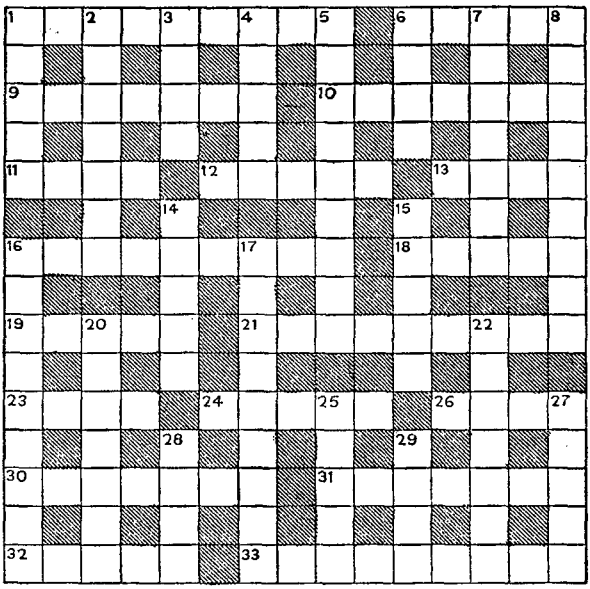
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 105



CLUES

Across

1 The part of the speedometer which measures only feet ? (9).

6 How a barrow-boy might address Drake's wife (5).

9 Less a hundred, pence can make for atonement (7).

10 Odd that the giants among this Continental race should be hares (7).

11 "Mr. Republican" (4).

12 Mathematical reptile ? (5).

13 Where's Pedro? Departed pronto (4).

16 Beyond the hill and you're on top (9).

18 Music for this girl—or boy (5).

19 Pampered pet, from Tibet (5).

21 Not decent to be glad ? (9).

23 Surely this animal isn't missing from the evolutionary chain ? (4).

24 Beefy way to start a match (5).

26 One should be enough to give a party (4).

30 Connoisseur, so don't anglicize his tail and make him a mere glutton (7).

31 Witness box for a ship ? (3, 4).

32 Confused fish takes to teaching (5).

33 No, the day before (9)

Down

1 A tawny little bird, was this young lady of Mr. Eliot's (5).

2 O, no, Fred, you're finished (4, 3).

3 Good to eat — with pepper before or sauce afterwards (4).

4 "— softly because you — on my dreams" (W. B. Yeats) (5).

5 When I leave this image, there's something to think about (7, 2).

6 Dose for the deer (4).

7 Hair-raising ship ? (7).

8 Sounds as if the lean-to was due for some Christmas decorations (9)

14 Paints me artistically around a daub (5).

15 When turned by Henry James it gives us the creeps (5).

16 Fluorescent illumination ? (9).

17 Not the direction to take for the Downs ? (2-7).

20 Why the judge dismissed his tailor ? (7).

22 Duplex (7).

25 Salad for the winner (5).

27 Tea's fine, but this is so much stronger ! (5).

28 Look out ! There's an Arab prince in the mire ! (4).

29 Grand place for herrings (4).

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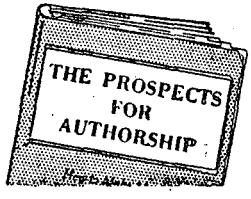

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